新妹魔王の契約者（テスタメント）

The Testament of Sister New Devil

I

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The TEstAmenT of SisteR New DeviL
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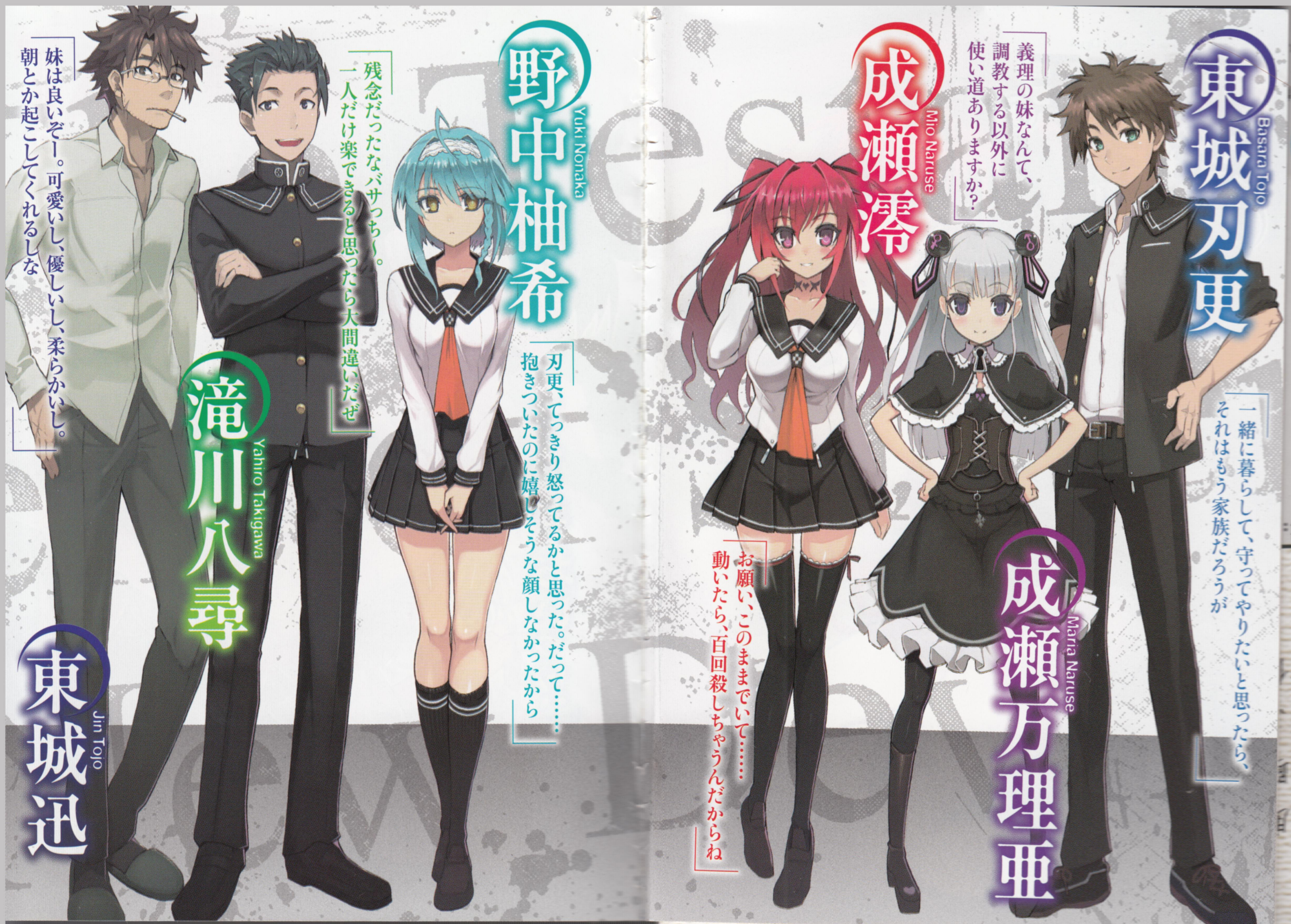
I


東城刃更
Basara Tojo
「一緒に暮らして、守ってやりたいと思ったら、それはもう家族だろうが」
成瀬澪
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「――う、動かないでっ!!」
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「さあどうぞ刃更さん……あーん」
「美味しいですよ澪さま――良かったら、そこの肩に付いてる部分とかどうです？」

「——どうしてっ!?」
「これで終わりだよ」
「……別に、彼女の味方になった訳じゃない」

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The Testament of Sister New Devil

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向き合う事さえままならずに、ずっと罪だけを背負って。
それでも生き続ける事で、誰かを守る事ができるというなら。

プロローグ　妹ができた日

1

「なあ——お前、妹が欲しいって言ってたよな?」

夏休みも中盤（ちゅうばん）に差し掛（か）かったある日の晩。

東城刃更（とうじょうバサラ）は、父親がさらりとそう言い放ったのを聞いた。

それは夕食の最中——刃更がカレーをおかわりするために席を立ったタイミングで、

「言ってねえよ。脳のヤバイ所にスパイスでも入ったのか?」

アホらし、とばかりに背中越（ご）しに言うと、刃更は炊飯器（すいはんき）の蓋（ふた）を開けた。

「反応薄（うす）いなおい……妹だぞ妹。男の子なら涎（よだれ）が出るほど欲しいもんだろうが」

「生憎（あいにく）と、妹じゃ腹は膨（ふく）れねーんだ」

The day he got a little sister

Part 1

"Hey—you said, that you wanted a little sister, right?"

The night of a certain day near the middle of summer vacation.

Toujou Basara heard his father say that so resolutely.

It was during their dinner—just as Basara stood up to get a second serving of curry.

"I didn't say that. Did the spice get into a bad place of your brain?"

Basara said so wearily over his back, then opened the lid of the rice-cooker.

"Such a weak reaction...it's a little sister, you know, a little sister. It's something guys want so bad that they start drooling."

"I'm afraid that a little sister doesn't fill my stomach."

Like he would go along with his father's antics. He had a great appetite. The stomach of a high school boy wasn't to be underestimated. Once he finished loading his plate with the rice, Basara moved in front of the pot with the curry on the stove. He poured the substantial sauce over his rice, then returned to his own seat.

"Huh? Where are the pickled vegetables?"

The bottle filled with the curry's relish had disappeared from atop the table.

In front of him, his father that sat across of him held the bottle with the pickled vegetables in one hand and said with a triumphant look on his face,

"Hey, let's talk a bit more enthusiastically about a little sister."

He showed a smirk. Basara made a sigh of resignation and looked at his own father—Toujou Jin. That father at a good age, tried to discuss the merits of a little sister with his son over dinner.

Putting it into words was quite painful. He felt a slight killing urge.

"Enthusiastic...actually, did I really say I wanted a little sister?"

"What...you don't remember?"

Jin said astonished.

"You said 'I want a little sister', which sounded like a light novel title, with sparkles in your eyes—about ten years ago."

"Like I would remember that!"

Ten years ago, Basara was still 5 years old. Without doubt, it had only been childish nonsense. However, Jin put up a hand with "Calm down".

"A little sister is nice, cute, kind and soft. She'll wake you up in the mornings."

"Well, that might be..."

"Yeah. Besides—you can do all the perverted stuff you want."

"Don't tempt your son into crimes! Actually, it would be scary instead if there was such a little sister!"

Such a little sister only existed in 2-D.

"What's up with you, dad...? You wanted to talk about a little sister that's likely to fall under the metropolitan regulation that bad?"[1]

"I wasn't really talking about fiction. Though the perverted stuff was certainly a joke."

Jin forwarded the bottle with pickled vegetables by sliding it over the table.

"Well, in short, what I want to say is: Do you like or hate a little sister?"

"What kind of survey is this? Well...a little sister from a drama or manga aside, I heard that a real little sister isn't all that great. Like they're cheeky and crude."

"Then, in other words, you would be fine with a cute little sister."

"Well... Guess so. —Actually, where are these questions leading to here?"

On Basara's words, Jin replied shortly with, "Yeah, well", then showed a suggestive smile.

And then, he spoke the words that would change Toujou Basara's fate.

"Aren't you glad—to get a cute, little sister?"

Part 2

Blue, wherever you looked. That was the colour of the sky on that day.

The weather was nice. The cicadas were chirping like a scream of the heat, as the temperature reached a new record high in history. It was an early afternoon in midsummer. Basara had come to a family restaurant in front of the station with Jin.

"I mean, seriously...?"

Toujou Basara mumbled in a still doubtful tone.

—Last night, Jin brought up the topic of a little sister. That was a flag for his second marriage.

Because he had picked, "If it's a cute little sister, I like her," from the choices, they came to meet her right away today.

"Stop sulking... When I called them, they said they wanted to meet and greet you as soon as possible. Besides, I asked you if today would be fine with you."

"Well, yeah..."

Certainly. Basara had told Jin, who had asked with his cell phone in one hand, "I don't mind," as he still couldn't comprehend the situation and was going with the flow.

However, after taking counsel with his pillow, he ought to think about it once more after all. Jin getting remarried meant that Basara would get a new family. And not just a little sister, but he might also get a mother.

...But.

Yes—that was still theoretical.

Along with Jin, the other family and the girl that was to become Basara's little sister were also sympathetic to the remarriage. But, despite that, Jin's remarriage was not yet set in stone. In other words,

...I'm the last one to get convinced, huh...

With the final conclusion resting on his shoulders while all other obstacles had been cleared, it was a somewhat annoying topic. When Basara thought of what kind of predicament he was in, an electronic sound suddenly sounded from the entrance of the restaurant. It signalled the arrival of a customer. While inadvertently putting himself on guard, Basara looked towards the entrance and made a sigh of relief. It had obviously been a different family.

"What are you getting tense for every time a customer comes in?"

"Wh-What does it matter to you…really."

While placing his cheek on top of his palm, Basara looked at the newly arrived family.

—A father, a mother and a child.

It was natural happiness. Thus, something really precious.

Toujou Basara wondered if he could get that happiness, which was what he wanted at that time.

—But what were the actual conditions?

He didn't know. A family of females was something unknown to him. But—he might get an answer to that now. By meeting with the people that might become his family in the future.

—And, he didn't even know himself why he did so.

It wasn't because of the electronic sound that signalled a new customer, nor was there really anything drawing his attention. Despite that, as if he was being controlled, Basara—suddenly shifted his gaze towards the entrance of the restaurant.

"——"

With leisurely steps, two girls entered the restaurant.

One of them was around the same age as Basara, likely a high school girl. The other one was younger than Basara. Because she was rather short, she looked both like an elementary and middle school girl. Those two were likely sisters, but—

"...Uwah."

He unconsciously leaked a voice out of surprise. So far, he had seen a cute girl on the street before. He also had inadvertently stopped and turned around to her.

But—the girls who had come in, completely surpassed that basic level.

After all, the other customers who had noticed the girls, also had their gazes pinned down on the two of them. Soon enough, the girls were led away by an employee to a table on the opposite side of Basara and Jin.

When he looked at their backs—another new customer entered.

It was a woman in her twenties with a peaceful aura together with her daughter in elementary school.

...Were they finally here?

Inadvertently, Basara stiffened up and at the same time, the two came closer like they had noticed him.

No doubt. Basara stood up from his seat with attitude to the coming mother and daughter.

"N-Nice to meet you... I'm Toujou Basara!"

However, the woman in front of him looked at Basara in bewilderment. She might have been surprised by the sudden greeting. Basara hastily tried to save the situation. Suddenly, a fist hit the back of his head.

"Oww! Wh-What are you…huh!?"

"Sorry about my idiot."

Before Basara could turn around, Jin forcibly grabbed his head and lowered it.

Basara got his body forcefully lowered until he was bending forward, but still managed to shake off Jin with force.

"Who are you calling an idiot!? To smooth out your sudden remarriage, I just tried to—"

Then, the mother and daughter passed by in front of Basara.

"Eh…?"

When Basara followed their backs with his eyes, the pair sat down at the next table—beside a man that was likely the husband. The husband welcomed his wife and child with a smile, but towards Basara, who had called out to his wife, he sent a short, strict glare.

…Ehm, in other words.

It was a misunderstanding. To Basara, who was about to explode out of awkwardness from his painful mistake, Jin spoke.

"You're too nervous...go wash your face and calm down."

"...Sorry. I'll do so."

He said so wearily, whereupon Basara unsteadily headed for the toilet in the back.

...Just what am I doing?

Getting nervous by himself, blowing his fuse by himself, getting elated by himself.

At that rate, it was unknown what kind of failure he would pull on the meeting. Like Jin had said, he ought to calm down a bit. While looking down, he opened the door to the toilet and set a step inside.

"Eh—?"

Toujou Basara raised his face and froze up.

In the opened room—stood a girl.

At that moment, an awkward silence fell onto the small room.

The girl in the toilet was the beautiful older sister from the pair of sisters that had entered the store earlier.

The girl had bent slightly forward, had rolled up her skirt and had both her thumbs in her white panties, as she was either pulling it down or pulling it up. With all thoughts stopped from the sudden happening, she looked at him dumbfounded.

But it was a misunderstanding. Basara had by no means opened the door of the female toilet.

The toilet merely was for both genders. She likely had used that double gender toilet, as the female toilet was occupied. However, that double gender toilet had a defect that was known to the usual guests—the lock didn't close properly. Therefore, the girls who knew of that, avoided using that toilet if possible. The restaurant had even posted a small paper saying "Please lock the door properly" inside to avoid any troubles. But even if one thought it was properly locked, it could happen that it actually wasn't—yes, just like right now. Basara hastily tried to close the door and turn on his heels—but suddenly he heard a 'certain sound'. It was the sound of the girl taking a deep breath. An action taken before a scream.

"—Hey, wait!"

"Mmg!?" Basara narrowly managed to quell the scream and made a sigh of relief for now.

...Wait, what am I doing!?

Before he had noticed it, Basara had completely stepped into the toilet and covered the mouth of the girl.

That wasn't good. It should have been an unfortunate accident due to a misunderstanding, but the situation had worsened so much that even excuses were useless now.

"Sorry for scaring you, but please—listen to me without making a ruckus. This wasn't on purpose. It's an unfortunate accident, a misunderstanding…"

That the occupied toilet door opened from the outside meant that the person, who didn't lock the door properly, was at fault. In other words, the girl. On an emotional level, she was a victim. Therefore, Basara explained about the defect of the lock and about the paper on the door. He desperately tried to convince her.

That there was no assailant here. And that there were only—two victims here.

Upon that—as Basara's explanation worked, the girl relaxed her body soon enough. "Ehm...I take it that you understand now?"

On his question, the girl gave back a nod. When Basara timidly removed his hand, the girl corrected her posture and laughed a 'Fufu'. A bright smile that seemed like a proof of friendship.

Good. Apparently his sincerity was conveyed and she comprehended the situation calmly. Hooked on, Basara also showed a smile with "Haha…"

—At that moment, he received an attack to the cheek and was blown off to the side.

It was a slap. Needless to say, the initiator defect door was unlocked. Basara bumped into the door and tumbled outside. There, he fell on his backside.

"Wh-Why…?"

"…Come again?"

While pressing on his cheek, Basara looked up dumbfounded. The girl had twitched the edges of her mouth.

"First you peek on a girl in the toilet, then you get inside, cover her mouth and try to make excuses… Put a hand on your heart and think well about what you have done—in the other world."

As if to give Basara the finishing blow, the girl raised her leg and it was then.

"—Hmm? What are you two doing there?"

That a familiar voice sounded from the side. He had probably come to check up on Basara as he was late.

Jin had come to the toilet at some point in time.

"Dad…" "Jin-san…"

Basara and the girl called out to Jin at the same time, then looked at each other with an, ""Eh?"".

And then—as Basara returned to his seat, now two girls sat in front of him.

The taller one was Naruse Mio. The shorter one Naruse Maria. Like Basara had imagined, the two of them were sisters. When they finished ordering drinks,

"Ahaha, sorry, Basara-san."

Maria showed a friendly smile.

"We properly told the waitress that we are meeting up with someone. But apparently, the one who guided us to the table didn't know about you two."

In other words, the shop assistants didn't speak with each other. It was an elementary mistake.

The puzzle had been solved. However, it didn't necessarily solve the 'problem' as well.

"..."

In contrast to the smiling Maria, Mio was puckering her lips wordless for a while now.

...Well, understandable.

To tell her to brighten up when someone interrupted her on the toilet earlier, would be asking too much. It left the worst first impression at the important meeting for the two remarrying families.

The remarriage wouldn't be cancelled because of this, but——Basara once again checked upon the expressions of Mio and Maria, who sat in front of him. And he thought,

…Still, they're cute.

Not the appearance alone, but their aura and casual behaviour made him excited. Specially Mio, who apparently was also a first year in high school just like Basara, albeit with a later birthday. In other words, right now, when their parents hadn't remarried yet, she simply was a girl of the same age as him. Of course that accelerated his heartbeat. Then,

"—But, I'm glad that you're a nice person, Basara-san."

Maria, sitting diagonally opposite to him, faced him and laughed with an 'Ehehe'. She looked very young for a girl only one year younger than Basara and Mio and in her third year of middle school. Her cuteness stimulated a boy's protection instincts gravely.

"As a boy of your age, I was worried about what to do when you were a guy sharp like a knife."

"Ha, Haha…"

An age where you were sharp like a knife, just what kind of age was that? The one of a national reaction entertainer? [2]

"No need to worry. I mean, he seems to fancy a cute little sister."

"Seems so. I mean, he came into the toilet occupied by a girl."

On Jin's light joke, Mio in front sent off a cold glare.

"I said, that was a misunderstanding, an accident. How often do---"

"Hmp, still making excuses?"

When Basara declared with a sigh, Mio bended slightly forward.

A distance that made his heart skip a beat unmeant. She looked at him with superb upturned eyes that emphasized their height difference.

"…..I'm sorry."

So weak. When Basara, unable to endure her destructive force, apologized, Mio nodded "Mm, I forgive you" satisfied and finally brightened up her expression. Basara made a sigh of relief.

"Oh right… ehm, excuse me, there's something I want to ask."

There Basara suddenly spoke out a simple question.

"Where's your mother? Will she come later?"

The prospect of getting a little sister, and even these two cute ones, had surprised him.

But well. Jin never had said that it would only be one.

However, their mother, who Jin was going to marry, was absent, which made this meeting pointless.

"Yeah, reminds me, I didn't tell you…"

Jin said.

"Their mother--- Chihaya-san is currently overseas for her work."

"……………Huh?"

Wait a moment. What did his father said just now? As bad as it sounded, the marriage partner was currently overseas?

"…. Aw… Dad, lend me your ear for a sec."

Grabbing Jin's arm, Basara moved to a place where their voices wouldn't reach Mio and Maria--- to the corner of the passage.

"…Sorry, but can you say that again?"

Basara crossed his arms and tapped with the index finger of his right hand on his left upper arm.

"Mh? 'Hey---You said, that you wanted a little sister, right?' That one?"

"How far are you going back! I meant about the stuff about your marriage partner being overseas!"

"So you heard it after all. So, what about it?"

"It's weird! That on a meeting for a remarriage, she herself wouldn't show up!"

Even more so, when they were the ones that wanted to meet as soon as possible. He wasn't going to blame her about going on a business trip, but a meeting without her was pointless. Actually,

"I hope I'm wrong, but… you're not getting tricked, are you?"

"Haha. No, don't worry. Besides, do you really think I could be tricked?"

Certainly. If anything, he was the type to trick. This phony father.

"But--- then we could just have done the meeting once she came back…."

"I'm afraid there's a reason as to why we better hurry up."

Jin changed his expression from a smile into a serious one.

"Basara… Now that you saw these two, what do you think?"

"What are you asking… Well, cute, I guess."

At any rate, he thought they were some kind of idols when he saw them at first. So…

…A reason as to why to hurry up, huh…

Judging by the conversation, Basara finally came to understand that reason. The prospect of remarriage meant that they were a family of just mother and daughters. And that mother was currently overseas on a long time business trip.

"I'm sure, a parent would worry, if these two are all left by themselves… Is that why?"

"Yeah. Actually, the two of them seem to be under the attack of some suspicious person. To begin with, when I first met them at the city, a weird guy was picking on them. Besides, there also seems to be a persistent stalker."

"For real…"

The world sure was dangerous, but to think there were actual casualties. It certainly was a pressing matter. The police didn't interfere with personal matters. They wouldn't move unless something happened, which would be too late then.

"I heard that Maria-chan stopped going to school, because of that stalker. Those who want to go to school should just do so, but for someone who can't, it's painful. Even if she's smiling so brightly right now."

Jin said.

"Well, for these reasons, I would like us to start living together already, if you have no objections. They also say a remarriage is more likely to work out if you know each other better beforehand."

"You mean to temporarily take care of them and see if it's possible to live together as a family?"

"This is some kind of destiny. If we can protect them, then you would like to, right?"

On Jin's words, Basara fell silent. It was a silence of affirmation. And-

…Mh?

Suddenly he made eye-contact with Mio on the other side. Like the earlier forceful attitude had been a lie, she had a worried expression. Basara narrowed his eyes and asked Jin besides him.

"---For how long?"

"For starters, a year. It might turn out we're totally unsuited to live together or reach a conclusion about the remarriage, but--- They will only get back to living alone, once a certain level of their safety is guaranteed. After hearing all this, I wouldn't be able to sleep anymore later when I know that something happened to them."

He had a point. When their mother comes back in a year and it was time to decide about the remarriage, it would all fall apart if something had happened to Mio or Maria.

More importantly--- Basara himself didn't want Mio or Maria to suffer.

"But where are we going to live? Our house doesn't have any rooms to spare."

"We'll rent a suitable one. I already have my eyes on one. We should create an environment as close as possible to a family, since we're trying to find out if we're compatible. And it'll quicken things if we actually do get married."

"…Do these two know about the living together?"

"Yeah. They would gladly do so, if you agree."

On Jin's words, Basara stayed quiet for a while. But, soon enough he mumbled slowly.

"……Okay. It's something you decided, Dad. So I'm fine with it."

He wasn't really casual about it. It was his true feelings.

"I see. Sorry for not telling you anything and proceeding on my own."

"It's fine. You must have your reasons for doing so."

He should just tell him everything once he was able to.

He and Jin were blood-related child and father, but their trust in each other was far beyond just that.

Ever since the time when Basara had caused that problem--- the time when he threw away everything to protect him.

"Let's get back, Dad… Or they will worry."

Saying so, Basara returned to their table with Jin. When they sit down on their seats,

"…Uh- Uhm,"

with a timidly tone, Maria tried to confirm their state of affairs.

"Ah, sorry… Just some talk amongst men."

"He made such a serious face that I wondered what it's going to be about, but then he said 'These two are so cute that I can't suppress my arousal'. Geez, boys in their puberty sure are horny."

"Hahaha. Dad, that will have an afterpiece."

An afterpiece about fists at night. Just with him and his father.

And then, to Mio, who looked just as worried as Maria,

"I was surprised by all the stuff I heard yesterday… But, it's all right now."

Basara said.

"Until your mother gets back and even though we still don't know if the remarriage will work out… I think it's a good idea to try out living together as a family before instead of just suddenly remarrying. Let's slowly get to know more about each other."

"…Really?"

Mio asked uneasily, whereupon Basara nodded with a "Yeah."

"We're a men's household, so having girls around really helps… Right, Dad?"

"Right. Besides, I always wanted a cute daughter. Basara also pestered me forever about wanting a little sister. So don't show any reservation, you two."

"Thank you." "Yay, please take good care of us."

Mio and Maria quickly lowered her heads. And then-

"Well then, take care of me, Basara-kun."

Raising her head, Mio gave him a smirking smiling face.

"But--- if you happened to come into the toilet again, I'll kill you a hundred times then."

"……Yes."

Her eyes were serious. When Basara's expression stiffened up, Jin said summing up.

"Okay then…. let's get along as family from now on."

This declaration made with a smile, was the beginning of a new life-style.

"Issues might arise, but--- let's become happy together."

Therefore--- even though prospects for a grim future hang somewhat in the air, it still felt peaceful.

Same for Toujou Basara's every day life----and for the world.

The way to conquer your little stepsister

Part 1

---Again a dream about that time. With just his consciousness floating in the scenery of the past, Basara realized that he was dreaming. Deep crimson. The crazy eyes with that colour had looked down on Basara in the past.

The angry voices of a large crowd. The crying voice of a precious friend in the background.

Amidst that, a black silhouette slowly came closer.

"------"

Oblivious of all around. He had to do something--- that was all he thought.

But Basara's mind neared it's limit on this tragedy happening before his eyes.

And in the next moment--- Basara's vision was coloured white.

His consciousness slowly faded away. He didn't know if he was saved or not.

Just--- Basara had heard someone's shout at the end.

Toujou Basara hadn't forgotten these words even now. The crying shout of a female repeated endlessly. Just like a curse--- It said, please give back that child.

Part 2

"---! Hah…. Hah….---"

Basara opened his eyes and at the same time made a rough breathing. In a situation, where he looked up to the ceiling, he realized that he had woken up. Taking a deep breath, he calmed down his chaotic heartbeat.

…No matter how often I see that dream, I just can't get used to it…

Laying on his bed face up, Basara stared at his own right hand that he had brought up to his face.

"…Huh? Somehow, it's still hard to breathe…"

Even though he woke up from his dream, he still couldn't breath properly. There,

"Ah---You're finally awake."

A sudden voice. When he lowered his gaze, on top of his summer blanket that he used instead of the normal bedspread--- a girl was mounting Basara around his hips with him pinched between her thighs. She had placed both her hands on his chest and showed an impish expression. That girl--- Naruse Mio looked down on Basara.

"Morning." "….Morning." Basara returned the morning greeting on reflex. Either Mio was just too light or it was because of the blanket, but he couldn't really feel that much of a weight. Still, this realistic feeling made Basara remember his current situation.

--- That he and she had started living together from yesterday on.

The movers had been requested to do everything from packing and sending the things over, for some extra pay.

And their work was good and speedy. It has been one week since they first met at the family restaurant.

The Toujou and Naruse Families safely started their living together after renting a single house. But,

"Ehm…What are you doing?"

"What you ask, waking you up of course. I thought boys would be happy about that."

On Basara's unmeant question, Mio smiled with "It's a service".

Most likely, Mio herself had intended for it, but--- this certainly was a service.

Usually in such cases, one would get on top of the stomach. But maybe she couldn't tell his posture due to the blanket, as Mio was sitting on Basara's hips. This was just like the cow-girl position.

Furthermore, the current season was midsummer. The season where a girl's clothes at the highest exposure rate of the year. In short, lightly dressed. Mio's attire this morning was a camisole-type brassiere top and hot pants. Her exposed thighs were dazzling his eyes and the feeling of her mounting him was the best as well.

But more importantly--- Basara's eyes were inadvertently attracted to some other spot.

….They sure are huge.

It had been on his mind ever since he saw her in the family restaurant. Mio's breasts were rather voluminous. Her corpulent swellings stretched out the highly elastic brassiere top all the way. The cleavage, where multiple fingers would fit in, wasn't to be ignored either, but sideline of her too big breasts--- a skin-coloured curve completely showed out from the side of the brassiere top.

"Hey, stop with the dumb face and get up already."

"Y- Yeah…" What to do. She herself didn't seem to have noticed, but every time Mio's hands pressed on Basara's chest, her breasts shook and gave an all too superb sight. Inadvertently, Basara didn't move, whereupon

"Hey, get up already or…Eh?"

As she suddenly noticed something, her expression changed into a doubtful one. And then, while confirming a sensation with her hand,

"…H- Hey, somehow… I feel something hard?"

Oh my? Basara tilted his head. Could it be, the effect of having her sit on his hips backfired?

"Ehm…is this the physiological phenomenon unique only to boys?"

"N- No! I wonder what it is… Maybe my cell?"

Yeah, Basara remembered. Last night he couldn't fall asleep, so he played on portable game console. At some point he had had fallen asleep, but that had to be it. Actually,

"I'm grateful that you came to wake me up, but you're not sitting on my stomach, but my hips. When a girls sits there and a real physiological phenomenon happens, I can't be held responsible."

On Basara's words, Mio instantly turned bright red. She must have finally noticed her own defencelessness. He thought for sure that she would jump off and step on him in a panic.

"Y- Yeah…I can't deny that. Y- You're a boy after all."

Surprisingly enough, she withstood it. Most likely she wanted to stay emotional superior to Basara. But it was quite obvious that she was agitated. Apparently she was fine when the things went the way she wanted, but was weak on unexpected situations. So to test it, Basara decided to tease her a bit.

"…Now then, guess I'll get up."

"Fueh!? Y- You're getting up?"

Basara said a "Yeah" to Mio, who immediately started to be restless.

"I can't really laze around here forever, can I. And you took the trouble of coming to wake me up."

"R- Right…. B- But"

Basara gave a wry smile to the flustered Mio. While looking up to Mio from below,

"If it's that troubling for you, wake me up normally next time. Not sitting on my hips."

It was meant as a gentle warning. But, Mio made a frustrated, red face.

"I, I'm not really troubled…. It, it's just a simple physiological phenomenon."

She was obstinate on a strange orientation. Basara had no time to stop her.

"C- C'mon, get up already!"

She grabbed Basara's blanket and pulled it off.

Upon that, something instantly shot up from under the blanket into the air---into Mio's direction.

"Eh….?"

Inadvertently letting go of the blanket, Mio caught it. It was neither a cell phone nor a gaming console. Of course, it wasn't a physiological phenomenon either. It was a remarkable something that came from between his groin and shot up into the air. Then what was it? Basara's eyes fell onto the plastic case. It was something often used for games or an image editor software---or rather, a kind of software itself. The back of the package was facing his way, so Basara could read its title.

The name of the product with a cute girl on the cover was:

"Youth Special Edition: My real little stepsister and I"

It was a game about a little sister.

"Hi….Kya--!?"

Mio threw the software onto Basara's stomach and fell from the bed, as she lost her balance in that very moment.

"H- Hey, are you oka---Mh?"

Upon that, the package had turned upside down. Now Mio was looking at the backside with the summary written on it. The game screenshots of the cute girl were full of naked skin and mosaics.

---In short, it was an erotic game. Moreover, it was a training style game, betraying the light title.

The supposedly fresh morning atmosphere turned into the most awkward scene in the world for a moment.

"Wh- Why is such a thing in my bed…?"

Basara was fifteen years old. He didn't remember buying such a thing. However, while Mio was shivering in the floor,

"Y- Yo- You…You were playing such a game on the night where we started to live together? I knew it… you want to do the stuff from the game to us as well, right?"

"What you mean you knew it! Actually, there's no way I have--- Oh?"

"Yah, hey….Kyaa!?" When Basara hastily denied it while trying to get off the bed, he also lost his balance and fell onto the floor. His lower body must have been numb due to Mio sitting on it. At once, he was hanging over.

"Ah…."

Just like been pushed down. At a distance where the breath could be felt, their faces were close to each other.

So close that it made you hesitate to speak. The sweet aroma of a girl.

The moment he had collapsed, both straps of Mio's brassiere top slipped down her arms and her big breasts were about to spill out. It had slipped down so much that the tip was nearly visible.

Furthermore, one of Basara's knees was between her charming thighs that appeared out from her hot pants and if he were to move even just one millimetre, he would touch a place that he wasn't supposed to touch by all means.

And in a silence of a few seconds, which felt like an eternity, unable to make even a quiver,

"Y…." "…Y?"

Mio finally uttered a voice and Basara repeated it.

"You perveeeeert!"

"Guaaaaaaah!?"

Mio's raised knee hit right into Basara's solar plexus. And while Basara's body floated a tiny bit, Mio escaped from the spot. At the door, she turned around to the on the floor writhing Basara,

"N- Next time you do anything weird to me, I'll kill you a hundred times!"

After saying so shouting, she left the room. Only Basara was left behind, writhing on the floor.

"Wait, it's misunderstanding…"

Reaching out his hand, he mumbled moaning, but no one heard it.

From atop of his bed, the adorable illustration girl looked at him like she was sneering at him. The heroine of "Youth Special Edition: My little stepsister and I"--- made a gentle smile.

"Damn you… Dad. To plant such a crude thing into my bed."

As it was summer vacation, Basara headed down the stairs to the first floor, still in his pyjamas.

Actually, Jin would be troubled if Basara get hated. Did he not care if the remarriage blew up? Well, regardless of how the remarriage went, he wouldn't stand for having his character doubted on a misunderstanding.

"For starters, I have to properly clear up the misunderstanding later…"

When he opened the door to the living room, a delicious smell instantly tickled his nasal cavities.

Especially the aroma of roasted bread made his stomach react.

"Ah, Basara-san. Good morning."

At the end of his line of sight, Maria, cooking in the kitchen across, noticed him.

"Ah, yeah… Morning."

Basara lowered his head a bit. Apparently Mio hadn't talked about the earlier misunderstanding yet.

Jin and Mio weren't in the living room. They must be either at the toilet or in the bath, readying themselves. Making a sigh of relief, Basara headed for the kitchen.

"Mh~ Hop…"

There he could see Maria perfectly handling a big fry pan with her small body.

Even while being the youngest, Maria had taken on all house chores, partly due to the fact that she didn't go to school. Either way, she had been boasting how she had taken care of the chores before their living together as well.

Maria wore a white apron with frills, like a newly-wed wife would wear. Equipped on the young-looking Maria it actually gave off a rather erotic feeling, which troubled him.

Basara opened the refrigerator with a cup, which he had taken out of the cupboard, in one hand and poured milk from a pack in it.

"Please wait just a bit longer. I'll be done real soon!"

"Yeah, than---PFFT!?"

Inadvertently Basara snorted out the milk from his mouth, which gave birth to a little rainbow in the air.

Because he got a full look at Maria, who had turned around to face him, from the front.

"Oh my, you spilled it. You're so mischievous in the morning already, Basara-san."

Maria showed a calm smile and came closer trotting.

"H- Hey! Wait, Maria-chan!"

Basara hastily put up both of his hand in front to stop her.

"Eh? What's the matter?"

Maria tilted her head. It was a cute behaviour like from a penguin. It made you inadvertently incline your body as well. But, more importantly,

"Right back at you, what's with that outfit in the morning…?"

Basara pointed out. After all, she was naked in an apron--- A real naked apron. Even though it was already the 21th century. Not good, he had to calm down. It was a penguin. If he thought about it as a naked penguin in an apron, it somehow should--- as if!

"Ehm… Something wrong with it?"

Without time for Basara to stop her, Maria spun around on the spot once more. However, "….H- Huh?"

Maria was properly wearing clothes. Because she wore a combination of a camisole and miniskirt underneath, it only looked like she was naked under the apron from the front. Then Maria,

"…Hohoho~n, I see."

When she looked down on her own attire, she smirked, as she had noticed what Basara had gotten so flustered about.

"You are an adolescence boy after all, Basara-san… Was it too stimulating for you? Did it arouse you?"

It certainly was quite stimulating. In a mainly pathetic way.

"…Did you have any weird thoughts?" "No, no." "Please get excited." "Haha."

Basara wondered if this conversation wasn't a bit strange for siblings.

"Oh right. Earlier, Mio-chan went to wake you up, but how did it go?"

"….Thanks to that I'm fully awake now."

He couldn't really tell her that he received a knee kick before breakfast. However,

"No, no, that's not what I meant."

Maria shook her hand with that and with a serious expression,

"That software like thing that I smuggled into your bed--- Did Mio-chan see it?"

"SO IT WAS YOUUUUUUUUU!"

Basara screamed at once. Culprit found. To think that it would be Maria.

"Just what for did you place such a crude thing there…"

"What for..? Because you seemed to be unfamiliar with training your little stepsister."

"I don't even want to be familiar with it! Besides, why do I have to train her anyway!"

"Eh? B- But…"

There Maria was suddenly bewildered.

"Except for training, there are no other usages for a little stepsister, are there?"

"THERE ARE! Actually, what do you mean with usages!"

Oh god. He knew that middle schoolers these days couldn't be underestimated, but what exactly did this loli little sister take her older sister for? There Maria shook her clenched fists wildly up and down.

"B- But… that game seems rather great? In the end, your little stepsister becomes your complete slave and just with verbal abuse, she makes a stupid lustful expression and squirts all over. So you should learn from it, Basara-san."

"I don't care! Why do I have to learn from something like that!"

"I, I mean… Except for making a stupid lustful expression and squirting all over, a little stepsister has no raison d'être---"

"She has! A lot of them!"

Apologize to all 3D and 2D little stepsisters! No, more importantly,

"Ehm, Maria-san…?"

While using a respectful calling, Basara started to ask her. He didn't want to believe--- but on the possibility,

"That game… could it be yours?"

What should he do if it was hers? Basara gulped.

"Oh please, Basara-san, how could that be? I am still in middle school."

Maria shook her hand while laughing an Ahaha.

"You are going to take care of us now, Basara-san, so it's a kind of moving in gift."

"That's the worst for a moving in gift. Make it something more decent."

"…In other words, you're saying 'The game isn't satisfying, give me a decent body'?"

"Eh…?"

"I, I understand. It's embarrassing, but if that's what you desire, Basara-san…"

In front of Basara, whose eyes were on fire, Maria took off her apron. Shyly, she reached her hand into her miniskirt and when she rolled it up, she fidgeted around purposefully.

"Uh- Uhm… I'm not that familiar with training, but starting with it in the bright morning is a rather high level, isn't it?"

"Like hell I'm doing it! Besides, training itself is already something unmanageable for a middle/high schooler!"

"Mhm, what's the ruckus about?" There was a voice from the door of the living room. It was Jin in pyjamas and the newspaper pinched under his arm. Basara hastily tried to make an excuse, but Maria reddened her cheeks before that.

"Ehm… Actually, I'm going to get my first training from Basara now."

"I already told you, I'm not going to---"

"---Hee, is that so."

Following, Mio came into the living room and sent Basara a glance like she was looking at a beast.

"Earlier… you pushed me down and now you're having a Youth Special Edition with Maria. Hee."

"Don't make me out to be the bad guy. My legs were just numb!"

And then Basara remembered with "Oh right".

"Listen, about the earlier software, Maria had---"

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

Instantly she played dumb.

"I have no idea what you mean. Basara-san, please do not push the responsibilities of your hobbies onto me."

"Kuh… Making an innocent face only now."

Even though she had put her hand into her skirt and was ready for training before, just to tease him.

"Dad…say something."

Father and son had lived together for years. His thoughts should be conveyed. Upon that, Jin, who had sat down at the table earlier, raised his head from the newspaper with a "Huh?", then rested his chin on his hand with a "Mhm".

"I understand that you're in high spirits over getting two cute little sisters---but please, no crimes."

"It didn't convey at all!"

So unreasonable, Basara thought. This was supposed to be his home, yet why did he feel so away?

Part 3

When starting a new living together, there were absolutely necessary things.

That day. While cleaning up the remaining luggage from the moving in the morning, they all went to the furniture store in the afternoon and bought newly needed things like curtains or sheets. Just looking around once in the broad store took a surprising amount of time. When they returned home, the sun was already setting.

---And presently. Toujou Basara was pedalling his bicycle.

To get to know the new city they moved to even a little better, he went around the neighbourhood.

"The evening is a bit more relaxing."

His muttered words were not a monologue. On the luggage carrier behind him sat Mio.

"Why do I have to…"

She mumbled dissatisfied while twining her arms around his waist. Riding a bicycle together with a girl. Moreover, one with huge breasts. A heart-pounding event for a man, yet the atmosphere was really strained.

"Don't say that… I don't know my way around here, but you come here often."

The high school Mio attended was close to the house they moved in to. Therefore when he went out, he had asked Mio if she could show him around the city. It seemed like she had understood that the software from this morning was a prank from Maria, but the awkwardness wouldn't disappear so easily. Mio had openly made a displeased expression and complained, but in the end she accepted to show him around.

"Hey… Basara, are you really attending the same school as me?"

"Seems so."

In response to the question from behind, Basara spoke words of affirmation.

---The school transfer was suggested by Jin. He could have commuted to his old school from the new house, but Mio's high school was in the walking distance. It also had a good tradition, so he decided to transfer.

He merely spent one term as a high schooler yet. Of course it wasn't like he hadn't gotten along with his classmates, but he had no regrets about leaving that school.

…Besides.

There was the stuff about Mio getting attacked previously. If Basara could ward off such a thing or risk even a little bit by attending the same school, a transfer was standing for reason.

Behind Mio just said "Mhm", not stating if she was against it or not. Basara and Mio slowly advanced on the bicycle in the madder red coloured city.

"…Hey. Can I ask what kind of dream you had this morning?"

"….Aw."

Suddenly asked with a casual tone, Basara scratched his cheek. Before Mio came to wake up him, he should have had a fierce nightmare. From Mio's viewpoint, it was an obvious question.

…I made her be anxious about me.

Basara ruminated what to do in an atmosphere, where Mio wouldn't urge him to answer.

Unfortunately, he couldn't tell an ordinary person like Mio about his circumstances. Therefore,

"In the past… when I lived in the country-side, lots of stuff happened. You could call it a trauma… Even now I sometimes dream of that time."

"…I see."

Mio said so shortly and didn't question any further. Still, for a little bit, he felt the atmosphere between them soften up. This must have been Mio's consideration.

Thanks.

If Basara were to tell her everything--- he would most likely be unable to live together with Mio and Maria any longer.

Since they were asked to buy some ingredients along with their touring, Basara and Mio headed for the supermarket.

"We bought a lot…"

As they had just moved, they ended up not just buying ingredients, but also all kinds of seasonings.

"I'll go get the bicycle first. The stuff here is heavy, so just come to the exit with the cart."

"Mm, okay."

Leaving the nodding Mio behind, Basara left the store first.

He arrived at the parking lot for the bicycles and unlocked his bicycle lock, whereupon

"---Can I ask what kind of dream you had this morning?"

He remembered Mio's words and the bad dream from this morning flashbacked in his mind. Instantly,

"……---!"

Basara forgot how to breath for a moment and pressed onto his chest as his heartbeat jumped up.

---How better would it be, if he could just forget. But, he couldn't afford to forget.

The incident five years ago. Basara was the victim and at the same time also the assailant.

Therefore, Toujou Basara was going to shoulder this pain for the rest of his life.

"…Aw, not good."

Remembering that Mio was waiting for him, Basara pushed his bicycle to the store's doorway. Upon that, he immediately spotted Mio crowded by people.

Geh, Basara grimaced. Mio was surrounded by four obviously bad guys.

And, Mio was shaking off the arm that was over-familiar put on her shoulder and glared at the guys fiercely.

"---Don't touch me. I'll kill you a hundred times, if you touch me! Hey, Basara!"

Such aggressiveness. An average high school boy might have gotten frightened by it. But unfortunately it had no real effect on these four guys. With a smirk on their faces, they didn't leave Mio alone.

"…Ehm, do you have any business with my companion?"

So for now, Basara tried to call out to them peacefully.

"---Huh? Who are you?"

"Well, her companion."

"Mhm… So what?"

Huh? Wouldn't one normally back off when realizing the girl had a guy with her?

In this kind of tense atmosphere, Mio looked at him with a stiff expression.

…Well, what now?

When Basara was pondering, the closest guy came closer with his head inclined diagonally while chewing messy on his gum. It was unknown if it was to threat or to provoke, either way he was good at making a pissed face.

"Basara, huh? What a lame name---"

"---Not so much as your face."

Saying so displeased, Basara pulled on the handlebar of his bicycle to raise it up. Letting the front wheel floating on the spot, the bicycle made a wheelie.

"Huh---?"

The guy looked up to it attracted and into his very face, Basara drove down the tire.

A direct hit. "Gueh", raising a short voice, the guy was knocked over to the back.

---On this sudden happening, everyone present there was dumbfounded.

Basara naturally made his bicycle stand again, then passed through the remaining three guys to reach Mio. There he grabbed the cloth bag with the purchased goods in the cart's basket.

"Bastard---!"

With an eye for the situation, Basara quickly opened the cap of the newly bought small bottle of seasoning and threw the contents at the guys that came to attack him.

"Guah!?" "Ass, hole…Acchoo!" "My, My eyes, it hurts…. Acchoo!"

Well, of course. It was 298 yen priced, plain old pepper.

"---Hey, stop standing there dumbfounded and run!" "Eh? Eh?"

Grabbing the hand of the confused Mio and the cloth bag from the cart's basket, he ran off.

Right now, getting away from here as quickly as possible took priority. Basara rashly pushed the cloth bag into the bicycle front basket.

"Hold on, we're gonna drive!" Letting Mio sit on behind, he took off at full speed. At the same time. "Guah----!?"

The bicycle treaded on something. Most likely, it was the guy that was still laying on the ground after being hit with the tire. However, there was no time to feel sorry.

Basara pedalled standing up, retreating from the place at full speed.

And then--- they roared down the main road together on the bicycle for a while.

They shouldn't chase after them anymore, just with that timing, the traffic light turned red.

"Fuh, we should be safe here…"

His breathing was a bit out of order from the dash in midsummer and sweat gradually spread over his forehead. There,

"…Sorry. It's my fault."

Suddenly, Mio's voice from behind became laudable. Mio placed her forehead on Basara's back and leaned her body a bit against him. Basara turned around over his shoulder and looked at Mio. As she was fretting over having Basara involved in her own troubles, Mio had cast down her eyes and was looking down with a bitter expression.

…So she can make a face like this too…

A new expression on Mio was before his eyes. But, Basara didn't want her to keep that expression. He couldn't find any suitable words to say---Still,

"Ehm--- How about we take a little detour home?"

At the same time the traffic light turned green, Basara turned the handlebar, which had started to let the bicycle run.

"…Eh?"

Mio raised a surprised voice on the change of course away from their house.

But Basara didn't stop. It was evening. If they went now, they should arrive at a perfect time.

The place Basara took Mio to was a park, proud of it's broad ground.

There existed also a scenic outpost called the setting sun hill, but since it was famous with the locals, Mio, who attended school here, must have known about it. Therefore, Basara dared to take her to a rarely visited place.

It wasn't a public viewing platform, but a point where you could get an entire view of the city.

"Waah…!"

Mio, looking down on the cityscape, raised a voice of surprised and delight. Just like Basara had predicted, they had arrived at the perfect timing. The world was equivalently coloured in a gentle madder red, a spanning sunset scenery.

"So pretty… But you just moved here, so how did you know of this place?"

"When my dad decided on the house, I was with him and I heard that the park was famous, so I came here alone while dad signed the contract. And then I found this place by chance."

Basara lined up besides Mio.

"Quite the splendid view, isn't it."

"Yeah. I never knew… that there was a place like this here."

"Let's come at night next time. The night scenery at the park is famous as well. I'm sure it'll be pretty from here as well."

He suggested a little promise for the future. Upon that,

"Yeah… You're right. …Next time then."

Suddenly Mio's expression clouded. From their position they could see the earlier supermarket as well. She might have remembered about the quarrel with the guys. Basara scratched his cheek with his finger and an

"Ehm".

"Today… This morning, you came to wake me up."

On these words, Mio looked at him. So, Basara spoke with a slow tone.

"A family, you see--- is probably something where any troubles or bothers for each other can be forgiven."

"Eh…?"

"To you, I'm a somewhat favourable existence, on the level of coming to wake me up, right now, correct? Of course it's not completely settled yet if our parents will marry… But we're going to live together anyway. By helping each other out with trivial things and acknowledging each other, I believe we're slowly becoming a family."

Because

"At least, I think that what I did at the supermarket was a natural thing to do. I'm sure, it's the same for my dad. If you or Maria-chan would get into that kind of trouble again, my dad or me will help you anytime. But, that's not something you should worry or feel reluctant about. I mean, it's the same natural thing as coming to wake me up in the morning."

For now, he had tried to somehow put his feelings into words.

"…….."

However, Mio shut her mouth and stayed quiet. Maybe he was too roundabout?

…I'm not good with words after all.

At times like this, Jin would have been able to convey it with more plain and simple words, but to his regret, Basara couldn't speak as confident as his father.

"Ehm, what I mean is."

Dropping his gaze to the ground, he tried to somehow consolidate his words, whereupon,

"…So cheeky."

Mio suddenly mumbled, to which Basara raised his head. Besides him, Mio wore a smile.

"Right now, you might have a been a bit like a big brother."

"…Really?"

"Yeah. Just a bit though."

Ohh. Kind of a good mood.

"Then how about we forgive and forget the incidents at---" "Not yet."

Said coldly, Mio's voice was yet bright. The earlier tense atmosphere seemed like a lie. So Basara thought. Their way to becoming a real family might still be long though.

But right now, Mio and he might have shortened the distance by a step. Therefore,

"Now then, about time we go back. I'm getting hungry anyways."

Back to the same house--- like a family. Basara turned on his heels and headed for the parked bicycle.

"…Yeah. Maria and Jin-san are also waiting."

He heard Mio's calm voice from behind, then her footsteps followed. Their two shadows slowly advanced in the same direction.

---But,

"------"

With his back to her and only seeing her shadow, Basara couldn't see Mio's expression at that time.

Mio's bitter expression that was filled with a even greater sadness than before.

Part 4

A week had passed, since they started to live together.

All the same, they still hadn't got away from the "More than acquaintances, less than family" stage.

Still, compared to the beginning, a lot of the awkwardness had disappeared--- At that time,

"---It turns out I'm going overseas for work tomorrow for a while."

"Eh…?"

Upon coming home, Basara inadvertently asked in return on Jin's sudden words at the front door.

Mio and Maria couldn't hear it. Right now, the two of them were preparing dinner in the kitchen.

"An Italian customer wants a picture of Arabia. So I'm making a quick visit to Dubai."

Jin's job was a freelancer photographer. A professional that lived on taking pictures.

For that, he sometimes had to go overseas to take pictures, but

"H- Hold your horses!"

Basara hastily chased after Jin, who was slowly going up the chairs after giving him a light clap on the shoulder.

"What do you suddenly mean with Dubai!"

Following after Jin into his room, Basara asked. However, Jin said shortly.

"It's a well trusted customer, so I have no choice."

Preparing for tomorrow's job, Jin started to put the lens on his camera.

Jin was a renowned photographer with customers all over the world. The name [JIN] was rather famous in part of the business and his pictures itself were evaluated to have an artistic nature, like paintings. He had a lot of fans and his annual income was one or two digits higher than an average photographer in the business.

"I know that clients are important, but… can't you turn it down?"

Presently it was an important and delicate period as they just had started to live together with Mio and Maria.

If the only adult left the house now, the mental support would be gone.

"We already have enough savings to make a decent living…"

"Trust is the most important thing in freelancing. When I turn him down once, he won't come requesting me anymore."

"But… you're the head of our family. It's your job to protect the family."

"That's precisely why I'm going. Listen, while I'm gone, it's your job as the eldest son to protect the family."

"That's…"

Told convincing like that, Basara had no words to argue back. Jin lightly rested his hand on Basara's shoulder.

He smiled.

"Don't worry. You can do it--- After all, you're the son I'm so proud of."

---And then the night of the next day.

"Okay, take care of the house."

With these short words, Jin left in a taxi.

"Geez…"

Basara dropped his gaze onto the object in his hands--- A single picture that Jin handed him. It was the commemorative picture of the four of them in front of the house, taken yesterday. Like expected, Basara's expression was stiff on it.

"…Mh?"

However, Basara suddenly felt something amiss with the picture.

In the picture, Mio and Maria were certainly showing a smile. Yet,

…Just my imagination?

Probably due to the effect of the light, Mio's face looked somewhat sad. She indeed might feel worried with the adult Jin out of the house.

"---Okay."

Basara left his room determined. While going down the stairs, he thought about ordering Sushi or Eel today. Jin had given him the credit card and eating delicious food was the best way to cheer up at such times.

So Basara opened the door of the living room

"Hey girls, about tonight's dinner---"

He could only say that much. As he then noticed the heavy atmosphere in the room. "…….." "…….."

Mio, sitting on the sofa, and Maria, sitting on a chair at the dining table, stayed quiet on Basara calling. But there was a reaction. They gave him a freezing cold glare.

---That was why Basara sighed wearily.

Aww, here it was. At last. He thought it was definitely strange to suddenly get two cute little sisters, even if there was a slight problem with their personality. It had finally come. The backlash of all the good luck so far.

Understandable. Not only did the only adult left, but the young girls and boy were going to live under the same roof all by themselves now. Of course they would get cautious upon being suddenly thrown into such a situation. Still,

"……………….." "……………….." wasn't this silence a bit too long? It was just like with a complete outage of TV or radio. "Uhm, how about we order something… Like Sushi or Eel." Even the high-grade one is acceptable, was what he suggested with a subtle polite tone. Upon that, "…You know, Basara, I have a favour to ask."

Mio finally opened her tight-lipped mouth.

"Yeah, sure, what's it? If there's something you want, just say it."

Basara immediately closed in to Mio. She wanted a favour. That trivial matter alone made him quite happy. And then--- Toujou Basara heard Mio's "favour". It was said with a marrow and bone piercing cold voice.

"---Get out of this house."

Basara froze up for a moment and searched for words to say.

"Ehm…"

Yeah. Kind of shocking. He was a bit surprised. After all she asked him to leave the house without any pretext. There was a limit to talking past each other.

"…Sorry, but can you say that again?"

For now, Basara wished that he misheard her--- though there was little hope.

"------"

Upon that, Maria raised her hand lightly in his direction. The hand was raised for a proposal--- No, not really. The palm of the small hand was held up towards Basara.

"Eh---?"

Maria's hand glowed--- At that moment.

Basara was suddenly hit by a kind of gust and blown against the wall.

"Guah---!?"

An impact on his back. Losing his breath for a moment, he inadvertently coughed violently. There,

"---Basara-san, did you not hear what Mio-sama said?"

Who knows when she got there, but Maria was standing right before him.

She showed a ruthless expression, which made her appear like a different person from until now.

"Just now… what was that. Who are you…?"

On Basara's sudden--- no, inevitable question,

"Hee… You are staying rather calm."

Maria said a bit surprised. The decisive words that would change Toujou Basara's life.

"Humans, who see magic for the first time, usually fall into a panic."

"Magic…?"

Maria affirmed the frowning Basara with a "Yes".

"Did you believe it to be a product of fiction or fantasy? Magic actually exists--- No, not just magic. Races apart from humans do as well."

At the same time she said that, something spread on Maria's back with a blue radiance. Something that humans absolutely didn't possess---Black wings. Her ears also changed into a pointed shape unlike before.

Not human. Even if they didn't believe in their existence, everyone knew their name.

"So you were a devil?"

"Exactly."

The moment he mumbled it, there came an instant reply without pause.

An affirmation. At once he didn't want to believe it, but it seemed to be true.

"And we will have you leave, Basara-san. Mio-sama will take this house."

Maria said with her chest puffed up, whereas Mio stayed silent ever since her "Get out".

…Mio-sama, huh…

Maria had changed her way of calling Mio, so Basara understood their relationship. Therefore he asked.

"…What's going on, Mio? Is this your doing?"

"Watch your tongue, Basara-san. You, a mere human, are being too disrespectful to the future Devil Lord."

Maria replied to Basara's question from the side.

"Devil Lord…. she?"

"There is a race called Devils. It is only natural to have someone rule over them. Just like our archenemies, the God Tribe, has a high-ranking God as a ruler. By the way, your so called Heroes do exist as well. Well, though they are basically living in an isolated village to hide their existence, so normal humans do not know about them."

"…………"

Basara replied with silence to the calmly told story. Even when he was suddenly told all that, he still couldn't believe the situation he was in.

"…What does the Devil Lord want with my house? I'm sure a Lord got a huge mansion in the Demon Realm."

"There are all kind of circumstances to it. I have no obligation to tell you about it. Anyway. Mio-sama and I will take this house--- To make it our base in the human world."

It was all a scheme to get a base of operation in the human world. Then,

"Then the remarriage between our parents---"

"Now that is something non-existent. We met Jin-san by coincidence on the street. He looked generous and is a good person, really…So I altered his memories with my succubus magic."

Succubus. A seductive devil that takes the form of a female and appears in dreams. If that was what Maria truly was, she would have no trouble to make a dream appear as reality.

"So you tricked my dad with magic by creating false memories of meeting your mother, which doesn't even exist, and even remarrying her…"

"Yes. And you are the next one, Basara-san."

Saying so, Maria held up her hand towards Basara.

"Basara-san leaves the house until Jin-san comes back, because he couldn't adapt to living with two girls after Jin-san left--- That kind of memory should do."

In regards to that, Basara still stayed silent and watched at Maria, then at Mio.

Upon that, Mio quietly stood up from the sofa and finally returned Basara's gaze.

"Sorry, but--- We'll take this house."

She declared coldly. With the same look in the eyes as at the incident with the delinquents the other day.

"Obediently receive Maria's magic and get out of the house already. Otherwise I'll scream and give you a memory about how you used violence against us and that you have to turn yourself in. Then I'll call the police. You don't really want to go into the brig for violence against your sisters, do you?"

"…….I see."

Basara looked downward on Mio's words and just said short and isolated.

Upon that, Maria's hand facing him glowed.

"What will it be, Mio-sama? It might be summer, but I do feel a bit sorry for letting him sleep outside. Returning to the countryside, where he was born, and living with his relatives…. how does that sound?"

"…Yeah, that's good."

Mio said.

"Bye, bye, Brother…It was not for long, but it was kind of fun."

With these words as a signal, the light in Maria's hand was released towards Basara.

What Maria had set free was a succubus magic that manipulated memories by showing a dream.

Because of that Basara's memories got altered and he left his own house--- or so it was supposed to be. However.

"….Oh?"

The memory manipulation magic certainly affected Basara--- yet, he didn't move.

…How strange.

While tilting her head, she was about to release another memory manipulation magic towards Basara.

"Eh…?"

Maria suddenly blinked her eyes. Basara, who was supposed to be in front of her, had disappeared.

On the small possibility, Maria turned around right away--- to her blind spot.

Upon that, in the middle of the living room--- there stood Basara.

For a moment he had gotten behind her. Maria gulped on that fact.

"A- Are you resisting? …Then it will be painful."

She sent Basara a fierce glare. She didn't want to hurt him, but now there was no other choice. Maria chanted the wind magic that had blown away Basara earlier and released it. The produced wind went straight for Basara--- At that moment. KEEEK, with a shrill roar, the wind magic was erased.

"Wha….?"

For a moment, she thought that she saw a white line coming from the side--- And in the next moment, her magic was erased. Maria looked in surprise. Basara in front of her eyes was suddenly holding a huge sword in his hands. That his arm was covered in armour up to the elbow was mostly due to a contract with the sword.

The power of a contracted weapon feed back even onto the user's body.

"…What are you surprised for?"

Basara slowly raised his head. He glared at her with a sharp glance, almost like a different person.

"You said it yourself. That Devils like you and the God Tribe, your enemies, exist."

A breath.

"And also---that a tribe of Heroes exists."

"No way… How?"

Next to him, Mio raised a voice dumbfounded.

"I mean, the Heroes are in hiding… Why are you here, living like a normal human…"

"Now I don't have any obligation to tell you that."

Maria gave Basara, who coldly disregarded, a surprised glance.

…How could this be…

No wonder the memory manipulation magic didn't work. Succubus could only manipulate memories by dreams on someone with weaker magical power--- Namely, normal humans, who were defenceless against magical power. It didn't work on anti-devil experts like Heroes.

But--- Maria was more confused about a different surprise than this fact.

Impossible, she thought. Namely, Basara's action just now.

Sure enough Maria didn't use an offence wind magic. She wanted to give him a bit of pain by sending him flying, so she just hit him with aviation magic. It wasn't harmful, nor powerful. So it wasn't all that strange that a Hero repelled or cut it off.

---Still, Basara had erased Maria's magic by swinging his sword. No, not just that. Once magic was activated, it generated some kind of magical remains, no matter the protection against it. Despite that, there was not a single trace left of the magic that Basara had cut off. It was completely erased. As if it had never existed to begin with.

"I no longer… have any ties to Heroes or Devils."

Basara slowly took a step forward.

"But unfortunately for you, I have no plans to go down silently."

Saying so, Basara moved flicking.

A Godspeed that closed the distance between them in an instant as if it had never been there.

"------!"

Not good. Maria stood before Mio right away to cover her. At the same time.

Basara's sword swung down on Maria and Mio.

"------"

Toujou Basara looked at the two girls, who were tightly shutting their eyes, that he tried to slash.

The sword in his hand--- stopped a paper-length away from them.

"….Ah."

Maria and Mio, realizing that they were safe, sunk down on the floor.

Their legs had given in. That was why Basara undid the incarnation of his magic sword--- Brynhildr.

"Why…"

On Mio's dumbfounded question, Basara turned his back to them wordless.

He felt a fierce rage towards them. Something that could never be forgiven. Yet,

"…Get out."

Basara muttered isolated.

"I don't care if you're Devils or the Devil Lord. But, our household hasn't the time to sustain folks that deceive me and more importantly my dad. I'll let you off for now. I'll send your luggage after you later, so---hurry up and get out."

Then, after a few minutes---the living room of the Toujou Household was enveloped in silence.

After regaining their strength in their legs, Mio and Maria had left the house. And Basara, turning his magic sword Brynhildr back into it's stand-by form, a pendant-chain, sat on the sofa.

"……"

Grinding his teeth, he held down his right hand, which wouldn't stop shaking.

…It's okay.

Basara desperately persuaded himself. He hadn't fought in a long time. His flair for it hadn't returned yet. That was why it was a complete coincidence that he activated that skill.

---Five years ago, when he was at the village of the Hero Tribe, Toujou Basara caused a grave problem.

[A certain incident] made his own power go out of control.

Originally it caused so much damage that it wouldn't allow him to live like he was now.

Still, as a result of all kinds of circumstances, it turned into him leaving the village together with Jin. In other words, he was chased out. And coming to Tokyo, father and son started to live in the unfamiliar city lifestyle.

"…..Damn."

Basara muttered loathsome. But, it wasn't directed at Mio or Maria.

Of course, Toujou Basara had no intention to forgive them. It was an inevitable fact that they tried to deceive Jin and him. But there was another one, who he couldn't stand.

---It was the guy, who was once called the strongest of all Heroes.

It was a Hero with an even greater power than himself, his father---Jin.

There was no way that this man didn't catch up on Mio and Maria's scheme. Maria had said that she manipulated his memories with magic, but Jin should have fended that off without doubt.

That was why Basara took the phone and dialed Jin's cell phone number.

"---Hello. What's up?"

After a few seconds of ringing, an all too familiar voice spilled out of the phone and Basara replied with a low voice.

"Dad…Do you have a minute?"

"Sure. The taxi driver is kind of tight-lipped anyway, so I'm bored."

Mixed in Jin's casual tone, he could faintly hear the sound of a low wind blowing. Most likely, the taxi Jin was in was currently driving on the highway. The driver would get to hear their conversation, but Jin would surely come up with some kind of excuses. Therefore,

"---What's the idea?"

Basara asked. Even as he tried to stay calm, anger resonated in his voice. Upon that,

"That was quick… You already noticed it? I expected you to take a bit longer."

Jin said freely without any sign of shame.

"I knew it. You were aware that they were devils---Since when?"

Tightly clenching the phone, Basara asked impassive.

"Right from the beginning. I knew them before they found me in the city."

"…Found? What do you mean…?"

On Jin's words, Basara frowned. Maria had said "We met Jin by chance in the city".

"Well, I'm sure those two thought it was just a coincidence."

Jin said in a nonchalant tone, then continued with "But".

"A while ago, I got some news that the [village] was secretly on the move. It's been close to five years that we left the village. It didn't seem like they were going to bother with us after all this time, so I just kept an eye on things for a while….but then the situation took a sudden change not long ago. It was relatively close by, so I decided to check out who it was, just in case."

A breath.

"After all---The elders gave them the surveillance rank S-."

"Surveillance rank S-? Those two?"

Basara's Tribe gave devils a ranking according to the threat they posed. And the Rank S- was one of the highest. Only S and S+ were higher.

….For real?

The devils usually lived in a different world from the human world--- called the Demon Realm. Of course some of them came over to the human world and caused some trouble at times, but it had been only low-ranked devils. Basically they didn't leave their own world.

Because presently, there was a truce between the devils and the Heroes.

---The fight between Heroes and Devils in this world had gone on for so long that neither side knew how long exactly it had lasted. But that was a thing from before Basara's birth--- His father's generation had put an end to it. The new Devil Lord had put a hold on the fight with the Heroes and God Tribe and withdrawn all devils from the human world.

So the devils that came to the human worlds were all rogue devils with low surveillance ranks, like E or D, or termination targets.

"These two are S-…"

Basara mumbled in disbelief. And then he looked at the palm of his right hand.

Even if they were just -, he had never believed to meet two S ranks in his life.

"To be more precise, Mio got the surveillance rank S-. Maria is only under watch as someone by her side."

"Mio…"

There Basara suddenly remembered Maria's words. The earlier battle in the living room. Even if they let their guard down as they didn't know that he was a Hero, as far as he could tell, Mio didn't pose that much of a danger. Therefore he had taken Maria's words as a made-up threat, but

"So she… really is the future Devil Lord?"

Saying so, Basara still denied that possibility. That couldn't be. After all,

"I mean, the Devil Lord has always been a man…. Even presently."

Wilbert--- the name of the current Devil Lord that had withdrawn the devils from the human world and was known for his moderate policy. Originally the devils' enemy was the God Tribe, "archenemy" as Maria had called it. So the devils only thought of humans as insects and merely tried to overthrow the human world for the sake of launching an attack on Heaven. From all these devils, Wilbert was the first moderate one that abstained from revenge against the Gods and was laying the path for a peaceful living in the Demon Realm. Above all, it should have been forbidden for them to hurt humans recklessly.

That precisely was the reason that the human world was so peaceful in the last six years.

However. Jin's voice through the phone overturned Basara's thoughts.

"The Devil Lord Wilbert died--- Roughly one year ago, it seems."

"Eh---?"

Basara couldn't comprehend the reported shocking truth at first.

"I, never heard of…"

"Because we cut all ties with the [village]. I only learned about it quite recently."

Besides, Jin added.

"If I had told you carelessly--- You would just have had that nightmare again."

"That's…"

Basara paused inadvertently. After all, he just had that nightmare the other day.

"But… that means, Mio is the next Devil Lord?"

"No. Apparently some other high-class Devil currently reigns in Wilbert's stead over the Demon Realm. And he seems to be quite the hardliner… He's after Mio, as she's Wilbert's only daughter and the successor of his power."

The Devil Lord Wilbert was known for his moderate politics, but his power stood out in the history of previous Devil Lords. That precisely was the reason as to why he could convince the combative devils to stop the fights and withdraw from the human world. If Mio had inherited that power of the strongest Devil Lord,

Then she was indispensable for someone that wanted to rule as the new Devil Lord. But,

"Wait a sec…"

There was still something he didn't understand. It was,

"I get the gist of things…. But, why did you take in these two then?"

That was--- beyond him by all means. By doing so, not just the Devils, but even the village would turn against him. It also contradicted the fact that he hid the previous Devil Lord's death to Basara just out of consideration.

"I told you that I have to check on things, right?"

Then, with the same casual tone like before, Jin's words were filled with seriousness.

"The moderate Wilbert had a lot of enemies amongst the Devils. For these guys the daughter of their hated Devil Lord would make a perfect hostage. Wilbert himself surely understood that the best. I heard that as soon as his daughter was born, he sent her to the human world and let her be raised as a human in absolutely secrecy by subordinates that played the parents…."

Even if it meant being apart from her--- he did it for the happiness of his beloved daughter.

That surely must have been a heart-breaking decision.

"But ironically, after Wilbert's death--- His enormous power was transferred to Naruse Mio, who he had sent away to keep her away from the dispute. She was a normal girl in middle school at that time… I'm sure you know what happened afterwards."

The new Devil Lord couldn't ignore Mio's existence. Nor the subordinates that played her parents. And right now, the parents that raised her were gone. It wasn't hard to guess what tragedy had befallen Mio.

"How… How can that be."

Basara said by squeezing out his voice.

"Our tribe and Devils can use supernatural powers because we know of the laws beyond the human world. Half a year ago, she was just an average girl, not knowing of it. Right now she mostly knows how to use her power, but she only inherited the Devil Lord's power itself and it's still not fully awakened. That's why the village set her as a surveillance target instead of a termination one."

Moreover, Jin added.

"The moderate faction lost a lot of power after Wilbert's death. That fact that Maria is her only guard is proof enough of that. Unfortunately, I don't believe that these two alone can oppose the current Devil Lord's faction. If left alone, they will lose their lives sooner or later."

"So, you pretended to be manipulated…"

He finally understood Jin's intention.

Basara sighed and shouted his words into the phone in the next moment.

"You damn imbecile--- Tell me this earlier!"

Then Basara could have helped.

"Sorry. I had decided from the beginning that you three would stand on equal grounds."

Jin said with a laugh.

"I hid the fact that they were devils and we had been Heroes. If one side were to know the truth about the other, they would think they had been deceived and all trust would be gone. But if both hid something, then it's a shared pain, right? Both sides had been deceived, giving you guys room for compromising---with me, aware of everything, as the bad guy."

"…That means that job offer also was a lie?"

If it was just to protect Mio and Maria, staying with them would be best. That Jin left the house despite that meant that he had a reason for doing so.

"Well, guess so. Sorry, but I have to check upon a few things---so I'm off to the Demon Realm for a bit."

That meant getting behind the enemy's line. Of course, Jin had once been heralded as the strongest Hero. And amidst the great battles, he apparently had went numerous times into the Demon Realm, but

"Is that… safe?"

"Yeah, don't worry. I can't tell you any details, but I just want to get in touch with someone. If all goes well, Mio might not be chased anymore."

Aha. So he would do something about the source. Then,

"Okay… Leave things here to me. I'll do something about it."

"I'm counting on you, my son. So? How are the girls? Well, from the look of it, I guess---"

Jin was still saying something, but Basara put down the phone, ending the call.

And then, he was already running in the next moment--- towards the front door.

First Master and Servant Contract

Part 1

Naruse Mio, chased out of the Toujo House, came to a park on a hill with Maria.

It was the park, where she had watched the sunset after cycling around the city on Basara's bicycle.

—30 minutes since they had arrived there. Mio silently watched the glow of the city at night.

It was a beautiful sight. The glow of the buildings and the light of cars or trains appeared just like an illumination. Mio thought, if that was how it looked when one looked down from the stars in the sky.

…Just like he said.

Remembering about the guy that taught her about this beautiful view, Mio frowned slightly.

"I knew coming together would be impossible…"

Back then, Mio had replied with a vague answer on Basara's suggestion. Because she had known. That there wouldn't be such a chance. Ever since they met, they had deceived Basara.

"Excuse me, Mio-sama… please do cheer up."

Maria next to her looked up at her with worried eyes. Her appearance was back to one of a human.

"We were just unlucky that they turned out to be Heroes. With someone else, I am sure—"

"No, Maria… let's put an end to all the deceiving."

Mio shook her head.

"I wanted a base without involving anyone if possible, but… deceiving someone for that is certainly not to my liking."

It wasn't like they were penniless. Mio's late foster father left them plenty of savings. But for a base, a single house was the best. If they carelessly rented an apartment or mansion in a living complex, the other inhabitants might get dragged in.

However, Mio was a minor to begin with. Furthermore, without relatives. And Maria was a child by appearance.

Like this they obviously couldn't buy a place, nor rent. Of course it was possible that Maria manipulated memories with her magic, but she would have to manipulated the memories of a lot of people, if they wanted to buy a house as a minor and live without drawing the suspicion from the real estate office. Moreover, the memories would need to match each person's position and relationships. The memory manipulation magic wasn't that powerful.

That was why Mio and Maria had done such a roundabout way.

"I understand… I will abide by your words, Mio-sama."

Maria didn't object. She must have understood her feelings. With a soft smile,

"That is what makes you kind, Mio-sama… I personally do not see any problem with deceiving a human that approaches us with ulterior motives though."

"Maybe…"

Maria said something reasonable. After their current parents had passed away, the lawyer entrusted with the will had tried to deceive Mio to steal her inheritance. When Mio had walked around at night with Maria, guys had approached them worried, yet with the ulterior motive in the open. Therefore they became unable to trust anyone than themselves. However if guys like them existed, they thought it wouldn't be bad to deceive them. After all, both side were lying.

—So, one month ago, when they were surrounded by delinquents in the city, Jin had come to their rescue.

They couldn't trust him either. He would just deceive them as well.

He would betray them in the end…That was what they thought.

That was the reason Maria manipulated his memories and planned to take over the house. But, by doing so, they turned into the same kind as these guys.

"…But, who could have imagined that these two were Heroes."

Mio showed a self-mocking smile. She wasn't blaming them for hiding their lineage. They had done the same. Of course they might be able to overwhelm Basara if they went back to the house now and fought at full power. There was a possibility to make that house their base then.

"But…"

Jin and Basara both had been different from the others they had deceived. She thought that she might have found people she could put her trust in, for the first time after the death of her parents.

…But.

What was the point of that now. It was too late. Time couldn't be turned back. Upon that,

"Mio-sama…"

Maria next to her called with a calm tone.

"Sorry… We need to figure out what to do from now on, but first we need a place to stay tonight."

But Maria lightly shook her head to the side. And then, she said with a slightly stiff voice.

"No— It looks like there is something we have to do before that."

On these words, Mio noticed the surrounding atmosphere.

Unnoticed, the park had become ominous quiet. An unnatural silence. Mio immediately understood what that meant. For the past half year, she had gotten the necessary knowledge.

"Magic to keep humans away…."

Mio or Maria hadn't used it. Then there was only one explanation.

"Please watch out… It is an enemy."

Maria glared in front of her. Upon that, there was a movement in the darkness there.

What appeared from the shadow were three ominous shades. These shades gradually changed shape.

One changed into a [shadow] that had a black humanoid silhouette with a long hilted scythe, like a death god.

The remaining two into a magical lion beasts with wings— A manticore.

Without a doubt, it was devils. And most likely servants of the current Devil Lord. They emitted a blatant bloodlust. It exposed their existence. And also their aim. Therefore,

"I see… To think that you would come on your own accord."

Mio challengingly glared at the three [enemies].

Her squeezed out voice was faintly trembling. It wasn't out of fear. But out of—anger.

"Unforgivable… I'll avenge my parents…."

Needless to say, Mio learned the truth and her lineage from Maria after her parents' death. That she, Naruse Mio, was the only daughter of the previous Devil Lord. And that the two people she considered as her parents were just foster parents.

As unbelievable as it was, she accepted it when Maria showed her true appearance and magic.

Yes. Mio's parents weren't related by blood to her. They might just have raised and looked after her because of an order from her real father.

….But.

Naruse Mio thought. The two that raised her were surely her parents.

Rather than the real father she never met, they were her precious family.

That was why she would never forgive it. Mio certainly had yet to awaken the power of her father— of the Devil Lord. Still,

"Kindly getting rid of all humans… Fine, bring it on."

Mio inherited something in the blood of her father. That was— the talent for magic.

"Prepare yourselves… I'll kill you a hundred times."

At the same time she said that, Mio's body emitted a crimson aura. She released her own magical power.

—Usually. The magical aura was a negative black.

The magical surge emitted by the enemies right now was a jet black, darker than the night.

In regards to that, Maria or moderate Devils like Mio's father Wilbert had a blue aura. It was a colour of those that had sworn to free themselves off the revenge against the God Tribe.

The aura of magical power changed colour depending on the heart of the devil that used it.

But— Mio must have sworn revenge for her killed parents and chosen the path of hostility.

So when she learned how to use her magical power from Maria, her aura was neither black, nor blue, but a scarlet even more brilliant than blood. The kind of crimson colour that burnt unforgivable enemies to ashes.

"—Okay, let's get started."

Special abilities like magic essentially didn't exist in this world. Average humans couldn't perceive that phenomena. Therefore they couldn't interfere here. And— Mio's words were the sign for the beginning of the battle.

The two manticore [shadows] closed in to them simultaneously. On this coordinated movement,

"Eat this!"

Mio released an offence magic. A flash and a explosion sounded at the same time. A lightning magic crashed down from the sky. But, the two shadows burst though the dust created by the attack.

Manticores. These keen-witted magical beasts must have dodged the lightning.

…What about the scythe guy…

She could no longer feel the presence of the enemy in the soaring dust. He must have been defeated by the lightning magic. In that case, Mio shifted her senses back to the two magical beasts.

"Mio-sama, I will go next."

Maria besides her kicked the ground and flew forward, standing in the way of the manticores. However it was a disadvantaged two vs. one with an overwhelming difference in physiques.

"——"

The manticores, deciding to finishing off Maria, who gave an easy target, first, split up to the right and left and made a pinching movement from the sides. Closing the distance, one came at Maria with it's fangs, the other with it's claws. A combined attack from the side and top. The only available option for Maria to dodge it was retreating. However,

"Ahahaha, so foolish."

Along with a laughter, Maria leaped forward. She headed for the right leg of one of the manticores— the one that tried to kill her with it's fangs. She closed the distance in an instant and when she was close enough to reach it with her hands,

"Please entertain me a bit."

Saying so, she swung down her right fist on the giant magical beast's head.

—Unlike Mio, Maria didn't specialize in offensive magic.

Then how was she fighting? That was answered— by a roar and an impact. The manticore, who received Maria's fist, crashed flattened into the ground. That impact hollowed the ground, making a crater. In it's centre, the manticore didn't move an inch anymore. It even lost it's shape. Maria looked down on these remains and snorted scorning with a hmpf.

"Is that all… So boring. Please resist unsightly and make me wet."

Then she moved her gaze to a new target.

But the magical beasts approaching Maria from the right changed his own course. It was plunging itself towards Mio. Mio didn't move. And the raised, sharp claw swung down on Mio.

KEEEEEK! With a metallic sound, the claw was repelled. The ferocious attack of the magical beasts had been fended off by a transparent wall that Mio had set up previously. Mio held up her right hand towards the manticore.

"It's over— Die a hundred times and try again."

At the same time she declared calmly, the red ball of light that Mio had created hit it directly.

After the explosion— there was not a single dust of it left.

"Are you unhurt, Mio-sama?"

On Maria's outcall from afar, Mio nodded with a "Yes".

…These guys had finally made their move.

It had been half a year since the murder of her parents— since the start of the tragedy.

The enemy hadn't used any flashy attacks so far, but now they had finally come after her.

"Fine… Just bring it on."

Naruse Mio would never forgive the enemy that killed her parents.

And she would definitely defeat the current Devil Lord that gave the order for it. At all costs.

"—Oh, we better get away from here."

By defeating the enemy, the magic to keep humans away should have been lifted. The place was a complete mess due to Mio and Maria's attacks.

They would get reported if a by-passer saw this.

…But, before that.

One last time, Mio looked at the night scenery of the city. At the scenery she was supposed to look at with the boy.

—That was an opening.

"Mio-sama!"

When she turned around on Maria's scream, a [shadow] stood in front of Mio.

The enemy that was supposed to be defeated by the first lightning magic. It's hand glowed with black magical power.

Not good— Mio immediately erected a barrier, but it was a bit too late. The [shadow] released a lightning attack magic, which lost steam midway by colliding with the barrier, but directly hit Mio nevertheless.

On that impact, Mio was blown backwards. The park was build on higher grounds— a hill. Mio had watched over the city from it's edge. Right before the cliff.

The wooden fence to prevent falls was aging and couldn't absord Mio's fall.

Therefore. Slung away over the cliff, Mio started to fall down.

"Kuh…!"

Mio tried to activate a wind magic right away, but failed to.

Due to the enemy's lightning attack, she couldn't move her body properly and couldn't focus her mind enough to cast magic.

…At this rate…!

It should be more than ten metre until the road below.

The ground was asphalt. Mio's body simply would be unable to endure the impact of the crash.

Mio cursed her own carelessness. Was dying here her fate?

Was this her life, dying without avenging the murder of her parents?

She tightly closed her eyes in despair and frustration—At that time. Mio heard a single sound.

It was a voice. A shouted voice that prolonged the vocal "o".

….Eh?

So Mio faced the voice. To right beside her. Upon that,

"—Ooooooh!"

On the tile of the concrete surface of the wall that guarded against soil slides. With that as his foothold, a single boy ran sideways with a terrific speed into her direction.

At the time Mio realized who it was, she was embraced in midair— by Toujou Basara.

"—Whoops!"

Catching Mio, Basara twisted his body in midair. Mio's vision alternated between top and bottom. And carrying Mio, Basara landed on the ground without troubles. There should have been still quite the distance to the ground. And Basara managed to cushion the landing by just using his lower body as an elastic spring.

"……….Fuh."

In his arms, Mio heard Basara making a breath of relief. Then she was slowly lowered onto the ground.

Still affected by the enemy's lightning magic, she sat on the ground.

"Why…"

Mio looked up to Basara. She still couldn't fully believe that she was saved.

Why did Basara save her? She didn't know the answer to that.

"Well, that's—"

Basara tried to save something awkwardly.

"—Watch out!"

It was negated by Maria's shout from the top of the cliff.

Naruse Mio looked. Behind Basara, who looked at her, the [shadow] came down jumping. Most likely as soon as it noticed Basara, it had jumped down the cliff in pursuit.

It had already gotten in range of it's scythe and was about to about launch a slash.

—But, that slash didn't happen. Before it could, the torso of the [shadow] was perfectly split in half. It took only an instant. For the sword to appear in Basara's hand and cutting the enemy in a flash in the turning motion. An unbelievable agility and swift swordsmanship.

"………….."

In front of the now dumbfounded Mio, Basara erased the sword from his hand.

When he then turned around to her, his face had a somehow troubled expression.

"Ah… ehm, you see…"

He was looking for words. While scratching his cheeks, Basara let his gaze wander around a bit.

And then— He slowly held out his hand to her.

"……..We're going home."

Without making eye-contact with her, he said brusque.

Part 2

—For now, let's return home together.

After the overcome predicament, Basara had proposed so, but Mio was still wary.

Basara was a Hero. Mio and Maria were devils. And Mio and Maria had deceived Basara. Taken all that into consideration, there was no reason whatsoever for Basara to save Mio.

She could tell that Basara had no hostility, but she was hesitant about her decision for a while. She must have considered the possibility of a trap. Amidst that, Maria convinced Mio as her follower. That there was no reason for Basara to trick them into a roundabout trap. If he wanted to kill them, he could have done so previously in the living room or could have not helped Mio just now.

So, before long Mio nodded small on Maria's persuasion.

And now presently— Toujou Basara was standing in the kitchen of his own house.

He took a well-cooled barely tea out of the fridge, poured it into a glass and took it with him into the living room.

"Ah, thank you."

When Maria took the glass, she drunk up the barley tea in one go. Basara inadvertently raised an eyebrow.

"….Now you sure drunk that without any hesitation."

Wasn't that too careless in any event?

"Well, sure it was me who said to come back here, but…"

"—be a bit more wary, you mean?"

With "I already said it", Maria set the empty glass on the table.

"You have no reason to do something so troublesome as to bring us back home and poison the drink after following us all the way to save us, despite throwing us out of the house once before."

Besides,

"You seriously were angered when you found out that we deceived you. That was because you truly considered us to be your family. Then these ten days we spent together, the time you came into contact with us, were by no means a lie. So I believe it is fine to trust you."

Maria shifted her gaze and asked "Or am I wrong?".

"I see…"

So she actually did give it some thoughts.

"…Well, Mio-sama's personality is like that, so she will be a bit obstinate for a bit longer."

Maria looked to the door of the living room.

"I hope she will settle down a bit in the bath."

Japanese summers were hot even at night. Fighting outside in this humidity, you would sweat by all means.

Therefore, Maria had recommended Mio to take a bath as soon as they got back to the house.

"—Anyway, may I ask at this point?"

Maria said.

"About why you, a hero, wanted to help us devils."

"Even if you ask… I just heard about your circumstances from my dad."

While scratching his cheek, Basara told her his reason for saving them. It was about Mio's circumstances, the devils general situation and the moderate faction, which Jin had all looked up. Therefore,

"My dad couldn't leave you guys alone and neither could I… I could never abandon you while I know of your circumstances. I mean, she bears no sin."

Naruse Mio had been living as just a simple girl. Having her life in peril due to other's conveniences was just too much. When Basara finished his talk with a serious tone, a natural silence befell the living room. Maria, who had cast down her eyes while listening to him, soon

"… I see, Jin-san did."

said with a meek expression and then suddenly raised her face.

"That sounds thankworthy, but— staying quiet when he knew everything, he is the worst."

"Well, I won't deny that."

But, he believed that it wasn't really her place to say anything, seeing as they deceived him as well.

"—But, I see that you two Heroes helped us simply because of that."

Saying so, Maria gave him a look that asked for his real intentions.

"Actually, the villagers decision to put us under surveillance is the kind of reaction you would expect, is it not?"

Maria's doubt was reasonable. No matter how much one sympathized with their circumstances, there was no reason for a Hero to help a devil. Yeah—Normally there wasn't, but

"I already told you that I don't have any ties with the Heroes or Devils…. Some stuff happened in the past, you know. Because of that, my dad and I are no longer Heroes now. Just simple humans, unrelated to the village."

Though it gave Basara's heart a never-fading wound.

But well, he was no longer tied down by the Hero's destiny.

"If I want to protect something, I do so… That's all to it."

"Even if it is a devil— one who has inherited the Devil Lord's power? By protecting Mio-sama, you are putting yourself in harm's way, Basara-san."

Basara nodded a "Yeah" to Maria's reminding observation.

"As long as you don't cause any harm to this world or it's habitants."

Upon that, Maria showed a wry smile.

"…You are such good-hearted people, both you and Jin-san."

"Not really. We're just wilful….As father, as son."

Therefore, Jin had readily decided to throw away the Hero status on the day the tragedy befell the village, the time when Basara caused that incident. So now— it was Basara's turn.

"…I understand. If that is the case, I will take you up on your kindness. Right now… Mio-sama needs as many allies as possible."

Maria's calm tone was filled with a heavy pressure. Then Maria corrected her seating position and bowed down deeply into his direction.

"Basara-san… My apologies for deceiving you so far. You will be dragged into our peril, but please take care of us. Please lend us your power, so Mio-sama will be safe."

A formal tone. The words of a subordinate that's worried about it's master from the bottom of her heart. Therefore,

"Yeah. That's the plan."

Basara once again spoke out his resolve. He couldn't keep running away from the past forever.

In that case, he would pick up the sword again and fight. To his current self, neither Hero nor Devil mattered.

I want to protect Mio— There was no lie in that feeling. He believed in that feeling.

"Well then, ehm… Maria-chan."

"Just Maria is fine. After all, we will be comrades now."

"I see— Then, Maria, except for the part with the attack, let's live together normally like we have until now. We're still not sure about the enemy's aim anyway."

"Eh? But, they directly came after Mio-sama…"

Maria asked back puzzled.

"Well… It just doesn't make sense to me."

Basara made a serious expression.

"The guys from the Devil Lord faction should be after the inherited power from the previous Devil Lord Wilbert itself, instead of Mio. Moreover, she hasn't fully awakened the power yet. If she dies now, no one knows who would inherit the power next— In the worst case, Wilbert's power might vanish just like that."

But,

"When you were attacked at the park, she could have died if I hadn't made it in time. Of course you never know what will happen in an actual battle, but…"

Was it just a coincidence, or were they after something different? He could think of a few possibilities, but time would surely solve it. After all, the enemy wouldn't pull back in silence now.

"I'm sure they also noticed that you guys have been put under surveillance by the Heroes. If they recklessly involved unrelated humans, they themselves will become termination targets next. It's unlikely they'll attack in crowded places."

That's precisely was why they used magic to keep away humans from the park this time.

"Well if they attack next time, we'll get them for sure."

Upon that, Maria said happily.

"So reassuring. I only saw a bit of it, but you seem rather strong, Basara-san."

"Well, don't expect too much… I haven't really fought for five years now."

He had managed to materialize the magic sword Brynhildr, but his body had grown quite dull.

It still wasn't in it's former condition. He would have to train from scratch in his free time or it would turn out bad.

"But. Earlier you erased my wind magic here. I was really surprised by that."

"Mh? Ahh…"

On Maria's words, Basara made a peaceful expression and

"I'm afraid that— was a fluke."

Basara shrugged his shoulders, whereupon Maria sharpened her eyes with "Oh please".

"There is no way you can erase magic completely on a fluke. Just what kind of technique was it?"

Maria was full of curiosity, whereas Basara showed a wry smile and dropped his gaze to his right hand.

"Sorry, but it really was a fluke…"

—Yeah, it had to be a fluke.

After all, that technique— became unusable after that incident five years ago.

Part 3

If drenched in sweat in the middle of summer, a shower was the better choice.

At first, Mio had intended to do so. She wanted to get out after quickly rinsing off the sweat.

—However, right now she let her body immerse in the hot water of the bathtub.

"………."

Mio tightly embraced her body in the bathtub. Even though it was summer, her body felt surprisingly cold.

…For the first time, I…

Since half a year ago— ever since her parents were killed, Mio had trained in magic and combat by Maria's instruction.

Thanks to that, she became able to chant magic even stronger than Maria's.

But an actual combat… A fight with her life at stake, that was a first for her earlier. Defeating the enemy. A wrong step might lead to death. Without doubt, a fight to the death had taken place there. Yeah— if Basara hadn't come to save her, Mio might have crushed onto the asphalt like that and died. When she thought of that, her body trembled beyond control.

For already nearly thirty minutes, Mio sat in the bathtub hugging onto her knees.

—A while ago, Maria had come once to check on her. She must have been worried as Mio just wouldn't come out. When Mio replied to her, Maria seemed to be relieved in the anteroom.

And then, Maria told her about the conversation with Basara.

Including the reason why Basara saved her.

"I have to get out…"

She couldn't stay in the bath forever. Mio slowly left the bath.

When she wiped her wet body with a towel in the anteroom, she inadvertently leaked an isolated mumble.

"Is it really okay…?"

Mio was still uncertain if it was alright to rely on Basara.

It wasn't like she distrusted Basara. In the ten days they spend together, she came to understand what kind of person Basara was, without having Maria tell her. He was the kind of boy that came running over once he knew of their circumstances, regardless of being deceived before. And apparently him being a Hero was also a thing of the past. Probably, it was alright to trust him.

Mio put her feet one by one into the new shorts and pulled it up over her knees and thighs up to her bottom.

…The problem is.

If it was alright to drag Basara into Mio's circumstances. The parents, who raised her, were killed. Moreover, by the guys, who also killed her real father. Even though she didn't do anything wrong, her family was unreasonably taken away from her— Naruse Mio remembered about that day vividly.

She would never forgive them. No matter how much enemies she had to make, she would definitely avenge their deaths.

Vowing so in her heart, she had lived the past half-year. And today, the battle had finally started.

The enemy was the new Devil Lord that reigned over the demon realm. Most likely, battles like earlier— no, even harsher and more painful battles would take place from now on. Was it really alright to drag Basara and Jin into these battles that were unrelated to them? As they both had given up on battles along with their Hero status.

"……………"

Then Mio finished dressing. Night had already fallen, but they still had a lot to discuss about the future, so she didn't dress in a pyjama, but a rough casual wear.

Her own expression reflected in the bath's mirror looked unusual gloomy, quite so.

When Mio squeezed her own body, there was a reserved knock on the door of the anteroom from the outside.

"Sorry, Maria… I'll be right there."

Thinking that she made her worry again, Mio replied so, whereupon

"Ah… No, it's me."

On the somewhat awkward voice beyond the door, Mio inadvertently gulped. She still wasn't sure what to say to Basara. She knew she couldn't keep quiet. But she found no words.

—Basara saved her life when she fell down the cliff after receiving that attack.

Mio had no words to say to that Basara. Upon that, "Sorry. I thought about waiting until you're out, but… But there's one thing I absolutely want to tell you beforehand."

Just what is it— Before Mio could ask back so, she got the answer to it.

"—Forgive me."

For a moment, she couldn't comprehend what Basara said.

"Wh- Why are you apologizing?"

When she inadvertently asked back with a trembling voice, Basara said apologetic from beyond the door.

"I heard about you from my dad and Maria. Sorry, I… didn't know anything about you. And then earlier, I just snapped… I'm really sorry."

"Th- That's…."

What to do? Even though she was it that caused troubles by deceiving him. Despite that, the one, who saved her life, apologized. And even before she could. Now she was at a loss for words even more.

"~~~~~"

Her vision swayed. An indescribable feeling rose in her. Suddenly, Mio heard a loud noise. Before she noticed it, she had fallen on her backside on the floor. Before she understood that her legs had given in,

"H- Hey! Are you okay?"

Surprised by the sudden loud noise, the anteroom door opened and Basara came inside.

When Basara entered the anteroom, Mio had sunk down on the floor.

Her face was red. Staying in the bath close to an hour, she must have gotten dizzy.

"Don't stay so long in the bath that you're unable to stand anymore… C'mon, you okay?"

His offered hand was shaken off. And Mio made a teary expression even now.

"Why are you apologizing… Even though I deceived you."

In regards, Basara scratched his head with the hand that had nothing else to do now.

"I also hid the fact about me being a Hero in the past. So we're even."

"B- But, we tried to take over this house… To chase you out. Can you still call that even?"

On Mio's strong tone, Basara bluntly declared.

"No… That certainly was your bad."

But, he said with a calm expression.

"You guys didn't know I was a Hero. If you just wanted a house, there should have been a better and faster method for that instead of manipulating memories with magic. By force, that is. But you didn't do that and tried to make me go back to the country side."

Why?

"You did that— to keep me away from your battles, right?"

On Basara's uttered guess, Mio widened her eyes in surprise. Apparently he hit bulls-eye.

"Why…"

Mio mumbled dumbfounded.

"Logically speaking, the time we spent together would be an act and chasing me out of the house would be your real intention. But, I actually have an eye for people. I might have snapped at first, but after hearing the circumstances from my dad, I calmed down and understood it." One breath.

"You didn't reveal your true colours— It's the opposite. You put on an act to chase me out of the house."

But, Basara continued.

"There's no longer a reason to keep doing that. Both my dad and I decided to protect you two. I mean, we're already a family."

"Wh- What are you saying… The remarriage was a complete lie."

Mio still wouldn't back down from her obstinate attitude, so Basara told her.

"So what. A family isn't just based on blood-relations or a family register. Living together with the desire to protect each other, that's already a family."

So he would protect her at all costs.

"I'm no longer a Hero. We have no blood-relation, nor a family register, but I'm your older brother. So, let me protect— you."

Declaring so, Basara then forcefully took Mio's hand and made her stand up.

"Yah… H- Hey!"

"Well then, let's get along again."

Facing each other, Basara grinned at her, whereupon Mio made a frustrated expression with "Muh~".

"St- Stop touching me already! Get out! I'll kill you a hundred times!"

"Oh my— Seems you two opened up to each other."

Saying so, Maria came into the anteroom. She trotted over to Mio.

"Well, though it seems that Mio-sama has not become fully honest yet."

"I, I'm not really, well…"

Mio turned red and hemmed and hawed, whereupon Maria, along with a smile,

"Then all is well. Truth be told, I have a little suggestion for you two now."

"Suggestion…?"

He knew that they had to discuss the future, but a "suggestion" rather than a "consultation"? Basara gave a doubtful silence, whereupon Maria nodded with a "Yeah".

"From now on, Basara-san will fight by my side to protect Mio-sama. Basara-san is Mio-sama's guard, so to speak. But with the current situation, he might not always be able to come to the aid if we end up separated for some reason."

"Well, yeah…"

Certainly, it was partly due to luck that Basara reached Mio. He had a strong hunch, since he told her at that park that they should come together again at night. So he left the house and headed there immediately. Of course he had confirmed her position with the cell phone GPS, but he caught the falling Mio on a close call. He couldn't deny the possibility that he would have been too late if he had checked her position on the GPS before starting to run.

"But, there is nothing we can do about that. We should be careful from now on that we don't get separated and in case we do, the GPS—"

"That is too naïve! You never know when a cell phone breaks down and runs out of battery! At a crucial time the reception might be bad as well or you could drop it on an enemy's attack! If you keep relying on such a thing, you might even fall into a trap in the worst case! Blindly trusting in modern science will do you no good!"

"Well, you have a point, but…"

Basara was overwhelmed by Maria's sudden passionate outburst. Upon that, Mio besides him,

"But, is there any other way? There isn't any perfect detection magic."

Exactly, was what Basara thought. Detection magic itself was rudimentary. However, in a fight it was one's first priority not to get found. Therefore there were various spells like magic barriers or decoy magic that prevent or mislead detection, so detection magic was pretty pointless for actual combats. But, Maria showed a smile,

"It is possible, to track down a special target. With the 'Master and Servant Contract Magic"— when you link your souls."

Something completely covered the floor of the living room.

The interweaving runes drawn by magic, were a huge magical circle for a ritual.

"…Are we really going to do it?"

In front of the magic circle, Basara said with an unenthusiastic voice.

The Master and Servant Magic turned one into a master and the other into the servant. But Mio might become the future Devil Lord. Position and personality wise, there was no way she would become Basara's servant.

Naturally, Maria also had suggested it on the condition that Basara would become the servant. But,

"Please do not give it too much thought, Basara-san. With this you two will be able to feel each other's presence. It certainly will form a Master-Servant contract, but it will just be a formality."

On Maria's persuasion, Basara still was indecisive.

"Linking each others souls with magic… That's all good for pinpointing each other's position, but when you even end up knowing about the other's thoughts, it'll be quite awkward."

There would no longer be any privacy. However, Maria shook her head.

"Do not worry about that— That is not the purpose of the magic."

Purpose? Basara frowned. Upon that, Maria

"More importantly, this magic is special as it can only be used in this world on a night with a full moon. If we let this chance go by, we have no other method. Besides, if any inconveniences arise from the contract, we can always annul it on the next full moon. Now then, please stand here already, Basara-san."

"Well… even if you say all that."

Besides, wasn't it harder on a girl than on a boy? Basara turned around.

"Say something. You don't want to have your soul linked to mine by magic, right?"

He called out to Mio, who had stayed silent the whole time. Upon that,

"…..N- Not really. I'm fine with it."

He got an unexpected reply. Inadvertently Basara frowned as he thought that he heard wrong.

"I, If you're alright with it… I don't mind either."

Saying so bashful, Mio gave him a quick glance. And then, "Basara— you're against it?"

"Eh? Well, rather than being against it… But are you really fine with it?"

"…Yeah. If it's just about each other's locations."

Ohh, it seemed she was serious.

…Master and Servant Contract, huh.

As her guard, it certainly was an attracting offer to be able to track down Mio's position.

Normally a Hero becoming a devil's servant was out of the question, but sadly enough Basara was just a battlewise average human. With the reliable Jin currently absent, he would like to eliminate all possible uneasiness for the future. Still— if possible, Basara wanted to stay on equal terms with Mio. Because he thought it would be better to stay as a family, as her older brother. And because Mio was raised by humans, even though her father was the Devil Lord, and lived as a normal human girl so far.

…But.

Toujou Basara remembered. The expression he saw on Mio's face, slumped down on the floor, when he came into the anteroom.

Her expression back then had been quite gloomy. And— the exact same face was now in front of Basara's eyes. Most likely, Mio was full of worry, which made her accept the Master and Servant contract. So, if forming the contract eased even a little bit of Mio's worries— it wasn't such a bad deal. The contract wasn't forever and only a formality with the possibility of annulling it. With that, he could temporarily form a contract with her until Jin came back. Therefore, Basara made a sigh.

"Okay——So? What do I have to do for that Master and Servant contract?"

Upon that, Maria, hearing his acceptance, instantly formed a smile on her face.

"Thank you. Well then, Basara-san, please stand on the side of the entrance… Yes, right there. That is the side for the servant. And, Mio-sama, please stand by the window side."

When both of them stood in their positions, the preparations for the magic started at once.

"Now then— Mio-sama, please hold my hand."

"Your hand? I just have to hold it?"

Seeing Mio obeying Maria by taking her hand,

"Huh… Mio and my souls are going to be linked, yet she's going to hold your hand, Maria?"

Wouldn't the three of them get linked then? Upon that, Maria nodded a "Yes".

"Mio-sama is using this magic for the first time, so I will take part as an assistance this time. Besides, I think it will be more effective if Mio-sama chants the spell with my magical powers, instead of her own."

Well, if that was the case. Then Mio, after getting told the chant by Maria, took a deep breath.

"Th- Then let's start…"

Saying so with a bit of a nervous expression— she started the chant. Instantly, first the magic circle on the floor started glowing, then Mio's body and following even Basara's body was bathed in the same light.

Seemed it was right that she was only lending her magical power, as Maria's body stayed as it was.

And then— When Mio finished the chant before long, Maria faced him.

"Soon enough a magic circle will appear on Mio's right hand for a while. So please take her hand, Basara-san, and place a kiss on the magic circle before it disappears. With that the Master and Servant contract will be established."

"—Huh? Kiss?"

He didn't really mind a kiss on the hand, but it must have been a formality needed for the contract. When Basara shrugged it off, the magic circle faintly raised up.

But for some reason not towards Mio's hand— but onto Basara's.

"Eh…?"

As she couldn't comprehend the situation, Mio blinked her eyes. In regards, Basara said doubtful.

"Hey… This got on my hand, but is that okay?"

"H- Hey! Just what is going on!?"

Mio changed her expression, grabbed Maria next to her by the collar and shook her. Maria tilted her head.

"O- Oh my? That is strange… Did I make a mistake somewhere?"

"What now!? Th- This is…"

Basara wouldn't become Mio's servant, but Mio would become his.

"Ehm, for now, how about you kiss Basara-san's hand, Mio-sama? You see, the contract will be reverse, but you still will be able to tell each other's position, like originally planned."

The moment Maria said that, Mio's face turned bright red.

"Y- You must be joking! Why would I have to become Basara's slave!"

No, slave kind of set a different nuance. Basara was against that as well.

"However, at this rate… Ah."

Looking on Maria's raised voice, the magic circle on Basara's hand was about to vanish.

"Mio-sama, hurry up! The magic circle, it is vanishing! We can annul the contract later on, so please kiss it for now!"

"B- But… we can only annul it on the next full moon, right? That's…"

Maria was impatient, but Mio was still hesitant, whereupon the magic circle faded before long.

"Ahh…"

Seeing that, Maria raised a fragile voice. At that time,

"Mm… Eh? Wh- What… the!?"

Mio, as her body suddenly trembled with a shiver, raised a confused voice. And then,

"No way… N- No…"

Turning red, she mumbled, then she slumped down on the floor. And then her body started to shiver bit by bit.

"H- Hey… are you okay?"

Saying so, Basara grabbed Mio's shoulder. In that moment,

"—Hyaahn!"

Mio made a sweet outcry and also shivered her body greatly.

"Wh- What…!?"

When Basara removed his hand from the sudden reaction, Maria next to him raised a flustered voice.

"Ahh… The curse is already in effect." "—The curse?" "Aww…"

Maria made a face like she had screwed up, which Basara quickly took a hold of.

"Tell me more—without leaving out anything."

"Ah, Ahaha…."

When he brought his face as close as possible, Maria made a dry laughter.

"Eh- Ehm, you know, the 'Master and Servant Contract' not only lets you grasp each other's position, but the actual important part also is that it always sustains the servant's loyalty. When the servant betrays his master or feels guilty, the curse activates as a kind of punishment. The curse normally is influenced by the chanter's characteristics, but this time we used my magical power for the chant."

Still collapsed on the floor, Mio continued to make sweet and heavy breathing along with turning red. Basara looked at her.

"Maria… if I'm right, you're a succubus."

"Yes. I can fight man-to-man, but usually I am a seductive devil."

"In other words— your succubus' aphrodisiac power turned into the curse?"

"…I am afraid so."

"YOU IDIOOOT!"

Basara inadvertently shouted in a loud voice. Of course there was also a problem with her trying to set a weird magic, but

"Why didn't you just let Mio use her own magical power? What would you have done if I assaulted you guys due to the influence of the aphrodisiac!"

"Ah, there is no reason to worry about that. The curse gets stronger when the servant tries to oppose his master and assaulting one's master is the ultimate form of betrayal. If it was attempted, the mind and body can no longer control the pleasure and one will faint or have it's brain roasted."

"The latter is too scary!"

That was the most nasty kind of death.

"Above all, it would most likely have been dangerous to have Mio-sama's ability characteristic. I mean, Mio-sama became able to use magic after Wilbert-sama's death, after she inherited his strength. It is yet to fully awaken, but it is highly likeable that she also inherited Wilbert-sama's characteristic. Incidentally someone, who opposed Wilbert-sama's contract in the past, seemed to have died by being crushed by an invisible power. Therefore I skilfully bypassed the danger of turning into a lump of meat due to the curse on a screw up with my quick wittedness. Yeah, truly by a hair's breadth."

"What are you proud of? This situation is just as dangerous."

"Hah… R- Right!"

On Basara's retort, Maria was greatly perplexed and looked down on Mio.

"At this rate, Mio-sama will go to heaven, in a double meaning! Wh- What should we do, Basara-san!?"

"Nah, a devil doesn't go to heaven upon death."

Basara said so wearily.

"But, the magic circle disappeared before the kiss. Doesn't that mean the spell failed?"

"Yes… however, the magic already activated by finishing the chant. And not kissing the magic circle means opposing loyalty itself."

"And so the curse activated strongly…"

This was the worst.

"Wh… Whatever, Mmh, just… just help me…"

Mio, with a completely enchanted expression, raised a bewitching voice and bended her body back and forth.

It was quite erotic. Basara inadvertently gulped.

"…How do we stop the curse?"

"Since it is the Master and Servant Contract magic, the curse will stop when the servant vows it's loyalty to the master. After the establishment of the contract, a light curse will stop after a set time, but this time the contract itself was opposed— so first you have to completely subdue her and properly bind the master and servant contract."

"Subdue her… What should I do?"

"It is simple— Please touch Mio-sama."

"Eh? T- Touch? …Where?"

Would a dispelling magical circle appear then? Upon that, Maria said composed.

"Anywhere is fine. Right now, Mio-sama's senses are increased a lot due to the aphrodisiac effect of the curse. Remember how she sensitively reacted to your touch on her shoulder earlier? Mio-sama has no experiences with men whatsoever, so she is unfamiliar with pleasure, nor has any resistance against it. I believe she will become obedient and vow her loyalty to you, Basara-san, if you touch her for about five minutes."

"W- Wait, Maria… What, are you saying…"

Maria showed a luxurious affectionate expression to the startled Mio.

"Please bear with it a bit longer, Mio-sama. Right now, Basara-san will make you feel better— yes, better indeed. It is by no means because I, a succubus, want to see you fall into pleasure or anything. Now then, Basara-san, please touch Mio-sama's embarrassing places already and make her feel better."

"Didn't you say I could touch her wherever?"

"Yes. Still, I want to save Mio-sama as fast as possible. The longer it takes, the greater the burden on her mind and body. If you truly want to help her, I believe you should touch her most effective places to make her submit as soon as possible. Well, if you prefer to tease her bit by bit, I do not mind. I also am into that kind of thing."

"Kuh….. Aw, geez, I get it."

He couldn't let Mio die from something this stupid. Basara sat down next to Mio.

"Yah… St- Stay away, idiot… If you do something weird, I'll kill you a hundred times… Mm."

"…Sorry, but give up on that. I'll make it quick."

Basara calmly told Mio, who writhed her body along with hot and long breathing, and reached out his hand for her.

First, he firmly held down her two arms, so that she wouldn't resist him.

"——FUAAHN"

From just that, Mio leaped up her body in a shiver. The skin he touched was clearly hot.

This heat and her erotic reaction nearly made him get discouraged already, but

"Basara-san— This is for Mio-sama's sake. You are helping her."

"…Yeah, I know."

On Maria's murmured voice, Basara replaced his thinking.

In short, he just needed to make Mio submit and swear her loyalty to him.

…If that was the case. Of course he never did something like that to a girl. But— As a Hero, he was born with the talent for a supernatural power, but to otherwise awaken a power, one must get acknowledged by the spirits in this world and form a contract. In other words, one must make the spirits acknowledge oneself. Most likely even now the Master and Servant Contract would be formed once Mio acknowledged Basara as her master.

Therefore Basara calmed his heart and just thought about making Mio acknowledge him.

To accomplish that, he had to touch Mio's weak spots, like Maria had said.

"Yah… Ah, Mm… Mm."

Basara searched for Mio's weakest spot over her clothes, touching her all over.

The curse must have been pretty strong. Wherever he touched, Mio reacted sensitive and shivered her body while leaking a sweet voice. But— After a while,

"Ah— HYAAAHN!?"

The moment Basara touched a certain place, Mio showed an unbelievable reaction. Along with a remarkable loud voice, she fiercely shivered her whole body. Basara inadvertently gulped and Maria showed a smile.

"Apparently you found it… Mio-sama's weak spot."

What he looked at was, the symbols of a woman, two soft swellings— Her breasts.

Therefore— Basara took a deep breath. Then he reached out for the most sensitive spot.

With her whole body controlled by a sweet sensation, Naruse Mio looked.

Basara's hand slowly reached out for her own breasts.

"N- No…"

She somehow managed to utter words of resistance, but Basara didn't stop. Staring at her with eyes that seem to be from a whole different person, he didn't allow Mio to resist any further.

…Wh- What now…. At this rate, I…

Mio clearly remembered the sweet stimulus that ran through her whole body in the moment when Basara touched her breasts earlier. Soon enough it would come again. Thinking so, she relaxed her body.

"A, Ahh…"

Finally Basara's hand touched Mio's breasts. In that moment, a sweet sensation rushed through her whole body and Mio fiercely shivered her body. It was the same sensation as earlier— No, an even stronger one.

"Yah… Not there, not…. Basaraa…"

Under Basara's body, Mio writhed her hips and said pleading words with an enchanted voice.

But, Basara still didn't remove his hands from Mio's breasts.

And then— Mio finally saw her own breasts changing shape on Basara's touch. She recognized the sweet sensation, but also how soft and sensitive her own breasts were. Mio's big breasts were at a size, where they spilled out of Basara's hands. Like accepting his five fingers despite that, they crowded out between his finger on every rub, lewdly changing shape.

Therefore she wouldn't deceive herself any longer. Naruse Mio knew that the current sensation was pleasure.

This sweet sensation robbed the notion called thoughts from Mio. And then the moment suddenly came.

"Ah— Y- YAAAAAAH!?"

After a moment of sense blankness— A fierce pleasure spark coloured Mio's vision snow-white.

A pleasant feeling gushed out from every pore of her body and she felt like she was floating.

Her body stiffened up on it's own and Mio forgot to breath for a moment.

"…, Ah… Hah… Ahh…"

Before long, she leaked a long breathing filled with a sweet heat. The white fog cleared and her vision faintly came back.

…No way. Just now, I…

As a high school girl, Mio possessed an average knowledge. Therefore, she understood in what kind of state Basara had driven her. In that moment— Mio trembled her body in a shiver. But,

"Yah… Wh- Why…?"

Mio raised a confused voice. She had thought for sure that this would be the end. Yet, the sweet sensation didn't vanish from Mio's body. Not just that, it got even stronger.

"That will not do, Mio-sama…. This curse is activated due to opposing the Master and Servant contract."

While saying so, Maria lowered Mio's head onto her own two thighs.

In this lap pillow position, her small hands held Mio's head from the sides.

"As long as you do not vow your loyalty to Basara-san from the bottom of your heart, this sensation will not vanish. Listen… Right now in front of your eyes is your future master. The one you will swear your loyalty to."

"Master… Loyalty…"

Maria's voice was sinking into Mio's conscious that was completely blurred already from the sensation. Therefore, Mio shifted her dizzy eyes back to the front.

Upon that, there was a boy looking at her— Basara.

Basara's eyes looking at her were so powerful that they sucked her in.

…Basara… He, is my master…

The moment she thought so, Mio felt a trembling happiness. Loyalty to an overwhelming existence— This joy spread in Mio's body at once and she was about to swear her loyalty to him like that. But,

"N- No… That, I…"

Still, with her last reasoning, Mio spoke out her hesitation about this sweet temptation, whereupon Maria made a sigh.

And then, she said something unbelievable.

"Basara-san, please fondle her breasts not over the clothes— but directly."

"Th…"

When Mio inadvertently reacted with a shiver, Basara asked Maria with calm eyes.

"…Is that okay?"

"Yes. If you hold back, you will never be able to set Mio-sama at peace."

While softly petting Mio's cheeks, Maria said in a calm tone to Basara. Upon that,

"—Okay."

When Basara said so shortly, his hand moved from Mio's breasts to the bottom.

"N- No way…"

While dumbfounded, she no longer had any strength to resist. Mio saw Basara's two hands going under the hem of her bra top. And then, these hands slowly started heading upwards towards her breasts. The hem was stuck at Basara's wrist and her bra top was rolled up bit by bit.

"Mm… Ahh, Yah…Don't, Broth- Brother, stop it…"

The cornered Mio called Basara "Brother" on the spur of the moment.

On this reaction, Basara suddenly stopped his hands. There Mio was taken aback.

… O, Oh no. I unconsciously…

Her face turned red. Naruse Mio realized her own true feelings that she wasn't aware of herself. After he saved her at the park, she wanted to call the all so reliable Basara that from the bottom of her heart.

Upon that, looking at her, Basara

"Sorry… Bear with this embarrassment for a bit longer."

declared so, whereupon Mio's clothes once again started to roll up.

"Mm… Ah, …. Yah… Mm."

The shame from having her upper body gradually getting exposed and the sensation from Basara's hands gliding up her stomach made Mio's body twist. However, that was all the resistance she could offer. Before long, her clothes had rolled up to her breasts. It meant that there no longer was anything between Basara's hand and her breasts. Unable to endure the shame, she inadvertently tried to avert her face, whereupon

"You cannot avert your eyes or close them, Mio-sama… Please properly witness with your own eyes what is going to happen now."

Maria, in which lap she laid, used her hands to make Mio's head face in front— to Basara.

She couldn't escape. And then,

"…Here I go."

Right after Basara declared just that— Mio saw her own breasts touched directly by Basara's hand.

Immediately, her breasts were fondled— Once she understood what that meant,

"————"

Naruse Mio leaked the sweetest voice ever so far and fiercely shivered her body.

And then— The curse on Mio lifted before long.

"Ah… Mm, Hah… Ah…"

As the sensation wasn't completely gone yet, Mio lay completely exhausted on the sofa.

"Nine times… Nothing less from you, Mio-sama. You were more persistent than I thought."

"Hey… aren't you technically her servant? Shouldn't you say something else?"

On Maria's mumbling in front of Mio, Basara said wearily.

—After that. Even after doing all that, Mio's heart still didn't submit to Basara.

Therefore, he had continued to fondle Mio's breasts numerous times until she swore her loyalty to her master from the bottom of her heart.

After repeatedly giving Mio's body the sensation that shivered her whole body, Mio soon after released a sweet voice and kept calling Basara "Brother" in a delirium. After the ninth time, as Maria had said, she finally swore her loyalty to Basara and Mio was freed of the curse of pleasure.

Maria showed Basara, who wearily looked at her, a roguish smile.

"Oh please~ You, yourself were quite into it after a while."

"Wha, that's not…"

Turning red, Basara hastily denied.

"Even though Mio-sama was so against it, you never stopped your hands."

"Th- That's… You said I had to hurry."

"But when Mio-sama started to call you 'Brother' midway— you shuddered."

"Uh…"

Certainly, at that time his reasoning was inadvertently about to crumble… wait, no!

"S- So, what now? We can really annul the contract, right?"

"Please rest assured. As I said previously, on the master and servant's consent, the contract can be nullified by chanting the same magic on the next full moon."

"The next full moon… That means, it won't be annulled for almost a month."

Upon pondering deeply, he fell into a light depression. Well, until then he should maintain a harmonic relationship with Mio.

If things like this now kept happening, it would be too dangerous in various ways.

And then. Basara asked the essential question, as the situation was resolved.

"—By the way Maria, why did you keep quiet about the curse?"

Ah that is, with that Maria made a sorry expression.

"Because you finally were interested in helping Mio-sama, I kept quiet just in case, so you would not change your mind midway… It is the truth that the contract can be annulled, so I thought that there would not be a problem. I am sorry."

"I see…"

Basara made a sigh.

"Huh… You are not angry? I believed for sure you would give me a genuine lecture until morning."

Basara nodded a "Yeah" to Maria, who starred in puzzlement. And then,

"—'Cause that's not my part."

At the same time he said that, Maria's head was firmly grabbed from behind. It didn't even need to be said who it was. Maria instantly broke out in a cold sweat and a penetrating cold voice called out to her.

"…Maria, we gotta talk. Come with me."

Grabbing Maria's head like a clamp, Mio left the living room, dragging Maria along.

"Aww, Mio-sama, my head, it hurts! It was not… It was not on purpose!"

Maria raised a scream, but Mio ignored it completely. They could be heard going up the stairs.

Upon that, there was a sound of a door on the second floor yanking open— then a fierce scream and a vibration of something heavy being knocked over. Moreover, loud crushing sounds of breaking something echoed in succession, but Basara pretended to not hear anything of that. Because he thought she should at least continue until she was satisfied.

And then— the noise in the Toujou household passed over the whole night, not stopping until dawn.

At the Threshold of Trust and Reunion

Part 1

The Master and Servant Contract immediately activated the curse when the Servant betrayed the Master.

After almost a month--- On the next full moon, it was possible to annul it.

At first they believed it to be hopeless, but they somehow managed to overcome the first week.

---Regardless of how it came to be, the contract was bound, so they had to deal with the situation.

To successfully avoid the curse from activating, they persuaded Mio now and little by little they confirmed the activation conditions for the curse and other effects.

And as of now, they had a good understanding about the contract magic.

First--- The servant wasn't forced into absolute obedience and could defy an unreasonable order. Apparently it was done, so that the contract wouldn't be used one-sided, but interactive.

Consequently, the master needed to reward his servant with an adequate attitude as a master. It was close to the "Reward & Service" relationship between the Shogun and Samurai, which takes it origin during the Kamakura period.

That said, even if the Master makes an unreasonable order, the curse will not activate for him due to the superior stance in the contract. Still, the fact that the servant could disobey a strange order was a salvation for Basara and Mio.

---Then what determined a betrayal from the servant, leading to the activation to the curse?

It was a bit complicated, as the condition for the curse's activation was "a mental betrayal".

That said, the servant wasn't forced into absolute obedience. He had the right to "oppose" an unreasonable order.

Also, actions that appeared like a "rebellion" or "betrayal", but were for example to "correct" a mistake, meaning an action for the sake of the master, were apparently forgiven.

But on the other hand, if the Servant disobeyed a legit order or took an unreasonable attitude, the curse activated without mercy.

And it seemed that the power of the curse was determined on the Servant's feeling of "guilt"--- in other words, his "mental betrayal".

When the curse activated, a mark appeared on Mio's neck like a collar as proof.

But--- Basically the curse wouldn't activate as long as she trusted and believed him.

Because the contract between Basara and Mio was conducted uncommonly, there had been confusion in the beginning, but originally it was a magic that strengthened the trust between Master and Servant, allowing them to keep track of each other's positions.

Therefore there was no problem. A week passed while desperately convincing themselves like that.

And then--- summer vacation came to an end.

That said, even with summer vacation ending, it was not the end of summer.

On sunny days, the temperature easily crossed 30°C.

A day with boiling heat from the morning on. Toujou Basara walked the street to school for the first time.

The second term from today onward. The start of his new school life.

"Aw, so hot… Damn."

He was wearing the summer uniform, but that didn't mean that his trousers were shorts. Additionally the surroundings were full of students with the same uniform. He hated crowds.

"Girls have it good… They get to wear short skirts."

"---Hey, could you stop being so egoistic? In exchange for that, it's cold in the winter."

A cold voice beside him answered the grumbling Basara. It was Mio wearing the same school uniform.

Since they mostly made sure of the activation boundaries of the curse, making an impudent remark in the middle of a normal conversation was no problem.

Malice or a guilty conscious were the problematic ones.

"But, in winter you can easily wear shorts or at worst tracksuits pants under your skirt, right."

Each of them cold-blooded spoiled a boy's pure heart. Upon that,

"That goes without saying. What's the point of letting yourself freeze."

"Then in the end, you're warm in winter!"

Not good. He inadvertently retorted, but what good was it to even get hot-blooded himself. There,

"Right, please calm down, Basara-san."

A young voice from behind. When he turned around, Maria was following behind them.

Needless to say she didn't wear a school uniform, but a refreshing dress.

"It is hot, because you think it is hot. At time like these, just look at me."

Saying so, Maria searched rustling in the convenience store bag in her hand.

Then she pulled out a pet bottle, drinking it with big gulps.

Next she ripped open a popsicle wrapping, taking a mouthful. Narrowing her eyes pleased, she faced him with a smile.

"How is it? When watching a refreshing scenery, you feel refreshing yourself, right?"

"As if!"

"Muh, I just wanted to cheer you up a bit, since I am asking you to guard Mio-sama at school."

While feeling despondent, Maria licked her ice. That appearance looked unnecessarily erotic.

In casual moments like this, he was reminded that she was a succubus.

"…I'll just be grateful for the idea."

Basara wearily faced frontward again. Upon that, his gaze fell on the wave of students with the same school uniform that flowing through the gate. Shortly thereafter, Basara and the girls arrived there as well.

"Oh, so this is it."

Basara stopped in front of the gate and looked up the big building.

Private [Hijirigasaka Academy]. That was the school Mio attended and which Basara would attend from today onward.

"Well then, Mio-sama, I will be on standby nearby."

"Yeah, thanks."

On the night of the screwed up Master and Servant contract, she had been filled with rage, but after a week, Mio's anger certainly had subdued. Mio and Maria had returned to their quite close sister relationship.

When Maria showed a smile on Mio's "Yes", she suddenly looked up to Basara.

"Okay, Basara-san, I leave Mio-sama to you. Though I doubt there will be any troubles in a place with so many people."

"Yeah, if anything comes up, I'll let you know right away."

However, suddenly doubt arose in him.

"But… You said you would be on standby nearby, but it's a weekday, you know? Won't it be troublesome if the police finds you loitering around here?"

Upon that, "Fufufu. Do not worry. It will be completely fine."

Maria laughed with Fufufu and pulled out a single card from the pouch she was carrying over her shoulder.

"Look, in preparation for such cases, I have a fake ID that testifies me as 18 years old. 18 years, you hear? With that I can loiter around during noon all I want."

"Oh really…"

Basara lost his strength. Just because she was 18 didn't mean she could loiter around all she wanted.

Or rather, normally anyone would doubt that age from her appearance---even when she was smiling so radiant.

Part 2

Upon entering the school grounds, the flood of students got to it's peak and the hallways were crowded with students.

Basara, a transfer student, parted from Mio and headed to the staff room first. When he told them at the door that he was the new transfer student today, he was told to wait for a bit in the waiting room next door. And after the chime rang a few times, a young male teacher came to pick him up with a class register in his hands. He held out his hand with a brilliant smile.

"I'm Sakasaki Mamoru, your homeroom teacher. Nice to meet you, Toujou."

"Yes, hello…"

Even while being overwhelmed by the unnecessary refreshing aura, Basara replied to the handshake.

Since the morning home room followed right after the staff meeting, they moved to the class room right away.

"Well, we often get transfers due to family circumstances, but your case seems a bit more complicated, Toujou."

"Yes, kind of…"

Nothing would come from hiding the fact that he was living with Mio. Therefore Basara told just the school that they were currently living together to see if they could be a family before the remarriage, when he was asked at the beginning. That said, he wouldn't announce that to the classmates though.

"But making a trial period like that shows that your parents are good people, who properly consider the feelings of their children."

Basara replied with the vague answer "Sure". He couldn't tell him that all of that was made up.

Although, it all happened from Jin's considerations, so Sakasaki's words weren't wrong.

…Ah, reminds me.

Basara asked Sakasaki what he suddenly remembered.

"Uhm… I heard that a friend of my father is at this school, but do you know anything of it?"

Jin might have received a favor from that person when he took care of the transfer papers.

Then it would be better to express gratitude to that person. However,

"Is that so? Well, I haven't heard anything in particular about that. Should I look into it later?"

"Ah, no, thank you."

If the homeroom teacher Sakasaki didn't hear about it, it might be better not to pry into it.

When he politely turned him down, they arrived in front of the classroom.

"This is our class. A new family and new school might bring various hardships, but you'll get used to it in no time. Besides, we have Naruse in our class."

Ohh, Basara was a bit surprised. It was rare that siblings or relatives were put in the same class. He thought for sure he would end up in a different class than Mio. They must have been considerate.

"Moreover there is our serious class rep and me as your homeroom teacher. If there's anything you don't understand, just ask without reservation. Okay, let's go in."

Saying so, Sakasaki moved into the classroom and Basara followed after him. The news of a transfer student coming must have spread already.

When he stood in front of the blackboard, he could look over the whole class.

…Geez.

Basara made a sigh at heart. All gazes in the classroom were focused on him and all at once they started to evaluate Basara. That was the unavoidable fate of a transfer student.

First of all, he saw everyone get discouraged, boys and girls alike, just by the fact that he was a boy. He was prepared for it, but before his self-introduction it already felt like a lost battle, which truly depressed him. He believed his looks to be average, but there were still a few girls that hadn't lost interest in Basara yet.

…Ah.

Amongst them was Mio sitting at the window in the back.

…She really stands out after all.

Seeing her like that, he once more realized Mio's cuteness. In the classroom space, everyone wore the same uniform and sat at the systematic ordered desks. The conditions were the same. Due to that, one's characteristic stood out excessively. When he stared at her, she averted her eyes towards the window.

He lost another interested one. Who remained was,

…Mh?

In the same window-row as Mio--- the girl at the very front was looking at him.

It was a pretty girl. Contrary to her vivid presence, similar to Mio's, she had an aura like clear water.

Their types were different, but she was a beautiful girl on par with Mio.

Seeing as the desk next to her was empty, it most likely was going to be Basara's.

Indeed, it was understandable that she was interested in him when he was going to sit next to her. But,

…Ehm, what to do about this?

He considered her a cute girl, but if she stared at him so directly it certainly was a bit awkward.

At that time, Sakasaki, standing besides the teacher's desk, eloquently wrote his name on the blackboard,

"Okay, as you can see, we have a transfer student. ---Toujou, introduce yourself."

"Ah, yes…"

coming to his aid in the silence.

"Ehm, I'm Toujou Basara. My name is a bit showy, but as you can see, I'm an average guy. Please take care of me."

Since they would inquire about it anyway, he made a self-deriding introduction, whereupon the expressions of the guys softened a bit. The atmosphere became somewhat welcome and Basara made a sigh of relief.

Then it was time for questions and with the silly questions and answers repeating numerous times, the chime tolled the end of the homeroom soon enough. Sakasaki clapped his hands together.

"---Okay, that's it for now. Save the rest for after the opening ceremony. Toujou, your desk is the empty one over there. Nonaka, you're the class rep, so look after Toujou."

"…Yes."

The beautiful girl from earlier stood up and nodded short. Apparently she was the class representative.

"Well then, everyone line up in the hallway. We're going to the gym."

On Sakasaki's words, everyone started to stand up from their seats.

"He tells us to line up… but in what order?"

Amidst the students pouring out of the classroom, Basara just stood there with no idea what to do, whereupon

"---Basara."

Suddenly his name was called, and Basara faced it startled.

"Ehm, what is it, class rep…?"

Before he had noticed it, the girl had stood right besides him. He was surprised by suddenly being called by name, but for Basara, the transfer student, she was the one to take care of him. Therefore,

"I hope we get along, class rep. I'll try not to cause any---"

troubles… was what he wanted to say, but couldn't. Because she suddenly hugged him.

"Eh---?"

For a moment, he didn't understand what was happening.

But the soft touch of a girl and the faint, sweet fragrance told him that it was reality.

"W- Wh- What are you two doing!"

Mio, who noticed the two of them before anyone else, pushed the dumbfounded classmates aside and came over with a bright red face. Her eyes were lightly bloodshot.

"Ohh!? Class rep, can you get away? Otherwise I think it'll be dangerous!"

Mostly for my own body though.

"Moreover, you call me by my first name and hug me, could it be you lived overseas?"

"…No."

On the question, Nonaka raised her face while still hugging onto Basara.

"Basara… have you really forgotten?"

Then she showed him a little sulking expression.

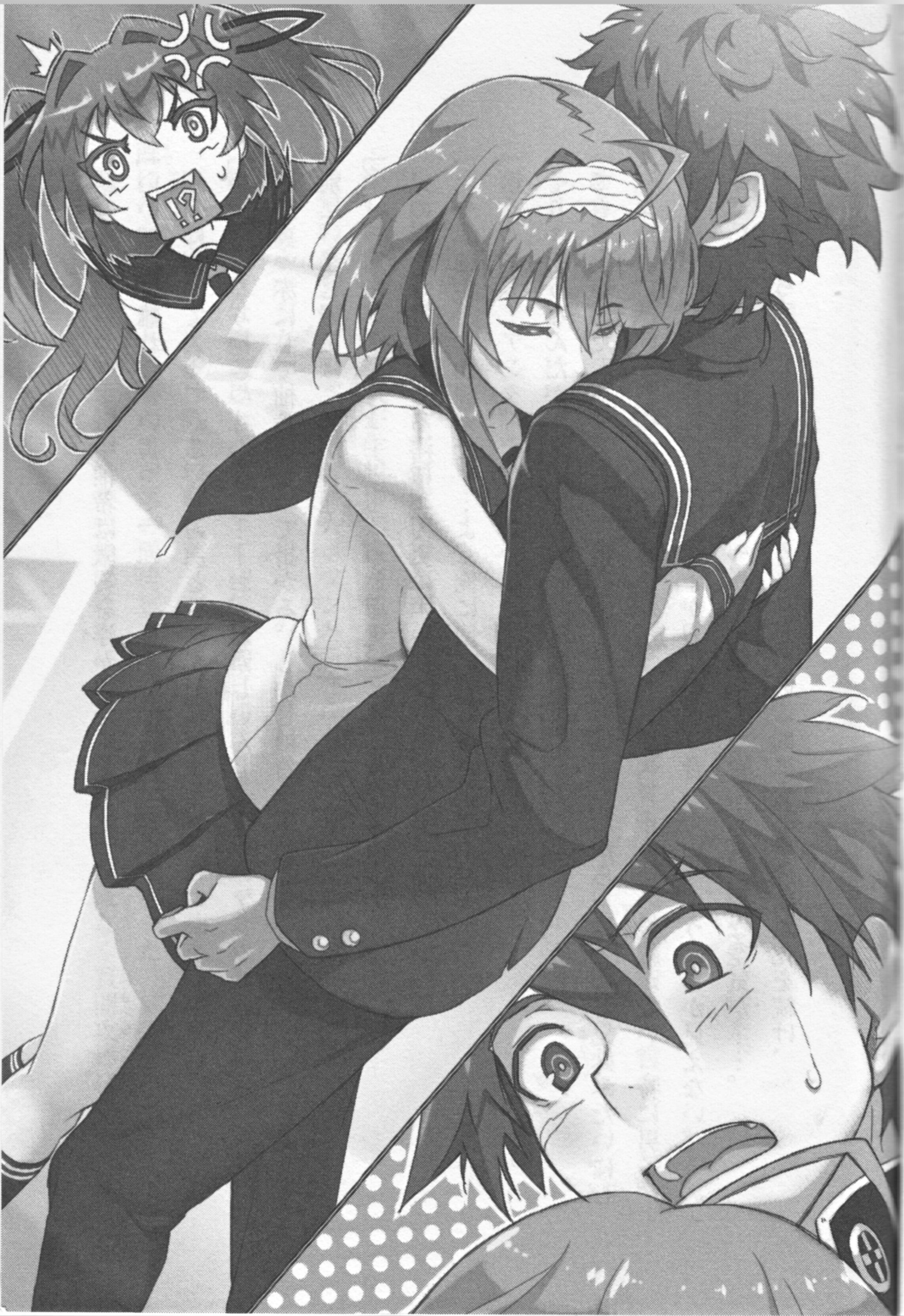
"Mh? Reminds me, the name Nonaka… Don't tell me,"

Basara remembered the last name of the class rep, which the homeroom teacher had called, very well.

"You're… Yuki?"

Upon saying the name of his childhood friend after a few years, the girl in front of his eyes nodded short with "Mm".

"Basara, it's been a while…"



Saying so happily, Nonaka Yuki showed a smile. Then,

"Get off him already!"

Mio forcefully got between them. When she pulled Basara and Yuki apart,

"H- Hugging him out of nowhere… A- Are you nuts?"

She flared up at Yuki with a bright red face. However Yuki stayed composed.

"Not really. This is normal between Basara and me."

"N- Normal…? H- Hey, Basara, what does she mean?"

Basara was troubled by Mio's ogre-like glare.

"Well, Yuki's my childhood friend… She was quite attached to me."

"Attached… You aren't a dog or cat!"

"Well yeah…"

But the fact remained that it was true. They were of the same age and lived nearby, so they grew up like siblings. Actually, it hurt. The gazes of his classmates, Mio's included, that is. Specially the ones from the boys.

Well, obviously. For a bystander it only looked like Mio and Yuki were fighting over Basara.

…Not good. At this rate, the friendly atmosphere I created with my introduction will…

But, how to explain it? While he was like that, the situation kept getting worse.

"…It doesn't concern you, Naruse-san."

At last, Yuki declared coldly--- But it provoked Mio's emotions.

"It, It does concern me!"

Before Basara could stop her, Mio shouted with a voice that reached down the hallway. The all decisive sentence.

"I'm… living together with him after all!"

Part 3

The opening ceremony ended and it became lunch break after a couple of classes.

A happy lunch-time atmosphere spread over the school.

Basara sat bored and alone at his own seat in the classroom. Inadvertently he mumbled.

"……For real?"

Wow. This was beyond his expectations. Could a person on his first day of transfer become this isolated?

First of all, it seemed like he made an enemy out of every boy. Just getting hugged by Yuki was bad enough, but Mio's declaration of their living together totally ruined everything.

For example, the girls showered Basara with question without mercy once they returned to the classroom from the opening ceremony. He got information about Mio or Yuki, but they sucked out all the information from him they wanted, then left satisfied and never spoke to him again.

Therefore Basara had no longer anyone to speak with, except Mio and Yuki.

---However these last two rays of hope weren't here either right now. Yuki left after being called by the teacher for some class representative work. When he then invited Mio to eat lunch together, she said "You finally reunited with your childhood friend, so eat with her for all I care" and left with the girls from class to somewhere. Probably because it was a suggestion that was considerate to him in a way, the curse of the Master and Servant contract didn't activate in particular.

And this--- led to his current solitude. Basara sighed wearily.

"Guess I should get going…"

There was no point in staying here. As he didn't have a lunch box with him, his choices were either the cafeteria or the school store. And when he stood up from his seat and left the classroom, Basara was suddenly called out to.

"Yo. Making most of the boys in class your enemy in an instant, you have some tough luck, Mr. Transfer Student."

When he turned around, there stood a boy, showing a friendly smile. One of his classmates.

"Ehm… Takigawa, was it?"

"Oh, you could tell? Have we met before somewhere or what?"

Takigawa made a puzzled face. Only Basara had introduced himself in front of the class. Needless to say, the other classmates,

Takigawa included, didn't name themselves.

"Well, it's thanks to this from Sakasaki-sensei."

Basara pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket and held it out. It was a copy of the seating chart that his homeroom teacher Sakasaki prepared from him, so that he could memorize his classmates' names as fast as possible.

"Hee, Sakasaki is perceptive as ever."

Takigawa nodded once he told his understanding, then placed his hand over-familiar onto Basara's shoulder.

"For that reason, let's grab a bite together, Mr. Transfer Student. You didn't have lunch yet, right?"

"Yeah… but how do you get to 'For that reason' from our conversation?"

"Because the transfer student, who's all alone after making an enemy out of all the guys in class on his first day, was hanging his head super depressed. It was just too pitiful, so I inadvertently had to call out to you. Besides, I moved near here just last year. So I can understand a bit the troubles and melancholy of a transfer."

He appreciated the concern, but couldn't he have said it better?

Well, he didn't seem like a bad guy.

"Just call me Basara then… I'll call you Takigawa too."

"Kay. So Basara, cafeteria or school store?"

"Let's see… The school store today, I guess."

Not to forget the incident during class break. It was unlikely he could calm down in the crowded cafeteria.

He wanted to buy something at random and eat at an isolated place.

"Then we better hurry. If we don't, there won't be anything decent left."

Saying so, Takigawa started walking. When Basara caught up next to him,

"Still, to be the brother-in-law with our Princess Mio and childhood friends with our Princess Yuki… Raising flags with both idols that our school is so proud of, that's one damn King position."

"Princess…? They are called like that?"

He thought that their appearances certainly stood out.

"Yeah, that's why I think you made other classes and seniors your enemy too. I mean, these two are really popular here and they seem to have a lot of passionate fans."

Takigawa shrugged his shoulders while smiling.

"Surprisingly a man's jealously is even greater than a woman's. And to be honest, it's quite lasting."

Indeed. No wonder then that the boys of the other classes glared at him with hostility when he left the classroom to go drink some water and that he felt a vague killing intent in the toilet.

"Aw, we're too late after all."

When they arrived at the school store, there was already a long line before the food.

Along with Takigawa, whose expression had turn bitter, Basara lined up at the end of the line, where he casually probed.

"Hey… About these passionate fans, has there ever been some kind of incident so far with them involved?"

"Woah, creepy… So, for example like what?"

Said Takigawa while looking at the beginning of the line. "Let's see" said Basara as a prelude.

"For example, someone tried to aggressively get at them… Or contrary, a girl, jealous of their popularity, did some kind of harassment?"

"No way. To begin with, the other fans wouldn't keep quiet if anyone tried to steal a march. Even the girls know of Naruse and Nonaka's popularity. They're aware that they would make the boys angry if they were to pull some kind of careless harassment."

"I see…"

In other words, Mio was the center of attention to some kind of extent at school.

There had been a risk of an enemy being mixed in the school, but it was unlikely that any flashy measures would be taken in that situation.

…Well, the first term actually did go by normally.

Of course it couldn't be asserted that the school was perfectly safe because of that, but at least it narrowed down the places and times, where they had to be wary.

When Basara pondered like that, Takigawa, next to him, suddenly showed a nasty smile.

"Well, there was once a sophomore boy that tried to steal a march, but was put through the mill by a couple of seniors… Going by that, you're probably in the most danger."

"Guess so…"

He got the feeling that it was true. After all, ever since he showed up at the school store, some guys had been glaring at him. It was good that Mio was relatively safe, but it made him worry about his school life.

"But are you going to be fine, Takigawa? Won't the passionate fans have an eye on you too when you hang out with me?"

On Basara's question, Takigawa smiled.

"Don't fret it. I have fast legs. If it comes down to it, I'll abandon you and run away."

Such a reliable classmate. Then Takigawa added "Besides" happily.

"Raising flags with our school's two beauties is quite the feast. The so called protagonist potential? If I hang out with a guy that has such 'luck' or 'invisible power', I think my school life will get quite lively. Let's get along from now on."

"Same here. But… I'm afraid I don't have such luck or power."

Basara made a wry smile. He already--- lost his qualifications to be a hero and was nothing more than a side-character.

Part 4

After school.

Mio, who had been silent ever since leaving the classroom, finally opened her mouth when they left the entrance hall.

"…Why are you following me?"

"Well, I'm just trying to go home…"

A sullen voice. Apparently the incident from after this morning's homeroom still had after-effects.

Well, it had certainly surprised him too.

---However, couldn't she fix her mood already? He had already been at the verge to be all alone at school, yet even on the way home it seemed that he wouldn't get a proper conversation.

In his opinion, it was time to remind her again about idea behind the Kanji 人.[3]

Supporting each other.

"Hey Mio… What do you think about the Kanji '人'?"

"It looks like Nonaka and you hugging."

Not good. Impossible. He couldn't count on her. Like this, he could only hope for the meddling of a third person.

Walking towards the school gate, Basara shifted his gaze to the far in front. Upon that,

"Mio-chaan, Basara-saan."

Maria, waiting outside the gate, waved her hand greatly. Apparently she was carrying out their setting as sisters in public. Well, it certainly would be weird when she called her "Mio-sama".

"Good job on sitting out your time… you two."

"Thanks for waiting for us, but your remark is a bit wrong."

Don't make it sound like we came out of prison. The counselling teacher is looking.

There Maria noticed Mio's bad mood and alternating looked at Mio and Basara's expression, then

"Basara-san, Basara-san…"

Pulling on his sleeve and taking a bit of a distance from Mio, she whispered into his ear.

"What is up with Mio-sama? It appears that her mood is kind of foul."

"Well, stuff happened…"

"? …Ah, I see. So that is how it is. That is not good, you have to use contraception."

"Hey… what did you think of in these mere seconds just now?"

Seemed it wasn't good to rely on someone else. He should do something about it himself. At that time,

…Mh?

Suddenly he noticed that Mio across of him looked at him.

"………."

Her expression looked like she was waiting for Basara's words.

…Figures.

Of course it worried her when the one, who promised to protect her, showed an expression she didn't know.

It was nothing to be surprised about. A trust between Mio and him hadn't been properly established yet.

Neither as a family--- nor as comrades.

…Worrying my little sister, I fail as a big brother…

When he thought so self-instructing, Basara returned to Mio's side.

"…….What?"

Mio faced sideways sulking and gave him a side-glance.

At the time he tried to find words to reassure her then.

"---Basara."

A quiet voice called his name from the side interrupting. Before he had noticed, Nonaka Yuki had stood right beside him. And ignoring Mio, whose expression instantly turned sour, she declared.

"I have something important to discuss… just between us two."

Part 5

Basara decided to accept Yuki's request to talk with just the two of them.

As expected, the bad-tempered Mio had left Basara behind and went home, but she had Maria with her.

Befitting the season, the sun was still up high and there were a lot of students, since it was time to go home.

It should be safe to leave the two of them alone for a bit.

Basara and Yuki moved to a café in front of the station. It was all fine up to the point where they got guided to an empty table at the back, but

"…Hey, Yuki. We're sitting at a table, not at the counter, so wouldn't you normally sit down across?"

Regardless of the table for four people, Yuki sat down besides Basara for some reason. Upon that,

"No. It's better when no one hears what we're discussing now."

There wasn't much of a distance to begin with, yet Yuki shifted her chair even closer to Basara.

A thin distance, where their arms could touch. The soft sensation from smooth bare skin and the sweet fragrance of a girl coming from Yuki.

…Ugh. This is bad…

During the time they had been apart, their intimacy had vanished and Basara was strangely conscious of the gap to his feminine-matured childhood friend. But in regards, Yuki took the menu card with a cool face and looked at it.

Then they both simply ordered drinks and when they dampened their dry throats,

"…Thanks, for coming."

Yuki slowly opened her mouth.

"No prob. I wanted to talk to you too anyway."

The glares at school were so heavy that he couldn't get a decent conversation going in the end.

"Good…"

Yuki made a sigh of relief.

"I thought for sure, you were angry, Basara."

"Mh? Why?"

"I mean… You didn't look all that happy, even though I hugged you."

"No, I just didn't realize it was you at that time…"

It had been already five years since he met Yuki last at the age of ten. They were both in their growing periods right now. It was understandable he wouldn't recognize her at once. And anyone would be troubled if a girl on the supposed first meeting hugged onto one. Besides,

"…You sure have changed."

What he first thought was, how surprisingly pretty she got. The Yuki Basara knew had the smallest and childish body amongst their old playmates, but now she looked more mature than her age.

Yuki said that it might be due to the change of her hairstyle. Surely, the old Yuki had grown out her hair.

But--- That wasn't the reason Basara didn't notice it right away that it was Yuki on their reunion.

He thought back.

…She wasn't the type to make such a face…

She had been sparing with words since forever, but had a great variety of expressions. But, Yuki's face, as she was looking at him awaiting from besides, looked completely inexpressive.

…Five years, huh.

Most likely she had changed in Basara's absence. The current Yuki might be no longer the Yuki he used to know. Just like the current Basara was different from his self five years ago now.

"…Actually, did I look happy in the past?"

Basara felt his thoughts going into a bad direction, so he got back on the previous topic.

Upon that, Yuki nodded a "Mm".

"When I hugged you, you would tightly hug me back."

"Mhm, is that so…"

"---Also, you often took advantage of the situation to touch my butt."

"Eh, seriously!?"

He didn't remember at all, but he was just a perverted kid then. What was his younger self doing?

…Ah.

Looking at his flustered self, Yuki finally brightened her expression.

That faint smile matched the Yuki in his memories.

It finally felt real to him--- That he reunited with his childhood friend Nonaka Yuki.

He was quite happy about that. But, that specially was the reason why he couldn't avert his eyes now.

"…So? What do you want to talk about?"

Yuki didn't answer Basara's question right away.

And the faint smile she was showing reverted back to the cold expression.

"…It's about Naruse Mio."

She said whispering. It were words he had expected.

"Basara… Don't get involved with her any more."

"So it's you after all… Her observer sent by the village."

Yes. Originally, it was strange for Yuki to be here.

For Basara's childhood friend--- a girl from the Hero tribe to be here, away from the village.

"Well she did get a surveillance rank S-…"

"…You knew?"

"My dad told me. I believe I know most of their circumstances too."

"Then I'll cut to the chase. Leave Naruse Mio at once."

Yuki overlapped her hand with Basara's, which rested on the table.

Then she softly leaned over and looked at him.

"She's being sought by the current Devil Lord--- At this rate you and Jin-san will be dragged into it."

---There were two people secretly watching Basara and Yuki from a few seats afar.

It were Mio and Maria. They wanted to go home ahead of him, but followed him after all because they were worried. They could barely hear their conversation.

"…It seems she is from the Hero Tribe just like Basara-san after all."

"Y- Yes… Looks like it."

On Maria's words, Mio nodded so a bit awkward.

…

She was Basara's childhood friend. With a bit of thought she could have figured it out, but agitated by the hug in front of her eyes this morning, where she ended up blowing up and revealing their living together, she just couldn't muster any sober thoughts.

Even now, she had thought for sure that they were having a date.

But--- Now that she thought back on it, she got the feeling that Nonaka Yuki had always kind of avoided her.

Of course everyone had own interests. If she was avoiding her, there was no need for Mio to forcefully befriend her, so she had kept her distance, but

…So that's the reason I felt her look on me despite that.

That said, there was no need for Mio to act as long as she wasn't challenged.

At any rate, her enemies were the ones, who killed her parents. Making an enemy out of the Hero Tribe could really foil her plans.

"Mio-sama, what do we do? It seems she is trying to separate Basara-san from us…"

"…Mhm, let's watch a bit longer."

If all went well, they might get to know about the intentions of the Hero Tribe.

…Besides, it could be that…She might get to hear Basara's true feelings. How he, who said he would protect her, felt at heart. It was an unforeseen chance, but the perfect one for Naruse Mio to make sure of the boy called Toujou Basara. Therefore Mio tried to perk up her ears to the conversation between them.

"---Mm."

The eaves-dropping behaviour probably made her feel a bit guilty. Due to that, Mio trembled her body with a shiver on the sweet sensation that arose from inside her body. The curse of the Master and Servant Contract.

"…Mio-sama?"

Maria, next to her, was puzzled, whereas Mio repeated "I'm not eavesdropping" in her heart while turning red. Convincing herself that she wasn't betraying her master, but only worrying about him. Upon that, the sweet sensation faded soon enough and Mio made a sigh of relief.

While observing Basara and Yuki again,

…Still,

Suddenly hugging onto him regardless of the place and now even leaning over and holding his hand, this girl--- even for a childhood friend, she was being way too clingy.

Don't get involved with Mio any more--- To these words from Yuki that resembled a request,

"Too late… I'm afraid I'm already dragged into it."

Basara slowly shook his head and declared his resolve.

"Both my dad and I have already decided to protect them."

"---But!"

Yuki raised an unusual loud voice. After gulping briefly, she squeezed out.

"In the incident five years ago, you…"

"……Yeah."

He knew what Yuki wanted to say. Due to the incident five years ago, Basara had to leave the village. Toujou Basara hadn't forgotten what he did back then, nor what he had lost. But,

"Still… I want to protect Mio. Mio doesn't wish for the power she holds. She just wants to live as a normal human, a normal girl. It led to the death of her parents by the ulterior motives of devils and right now--- she herself is in danger of being killed for her power."

He couldn't overlook that. He had a reason not to.

"She's innocent. If you guys, the village is willing to protect her---"

"…That alone is impossible. You should know that."

"Yeah…"

Basara gave Yuki, who darkened her expression, a wry smile.

The Hero Tribe existed to protect the peace in the human world from the devils.

That doctrine took priority over everything else--- Even at the cost of whatever sacrifices.

---The Heroes of this world weren't the kind of fantasy heroes that protected everyone.

Keeping their own existence secret, they only protected the world itself. For that sake sacrifices were necessary. Basara understood that as well--- That precisely was the reason for the happenings after the incident five years ago.

Basara had lost his qualification as a Hero and since Jin couldn't keep protecting him as a Hero, he quit too--- both of them leaving the village.

And Mio's life being in danger was at best an internal quarrel between devils. The Heroes had no reason to help her.

Therefore. Basara and Jin were the only ones who could protect Mio.

"I understand your worry, Yuki. Five years ago, I couldn't undertake the consequences of my actions to the last."

"No. That wasn't your fault… I mean,"

Basara cut into the words Yuki wanted to say now by shaking his head with "No".

"Still, it doesn't undo what I have done."

Upon that, there was a change in Yuki, who stayed silent so far. Looking down, her face still looked like she was close to tears.

"…'Dat ain't true."

She said so with a dialect. It was her bad habit that showed up when she couldn't control her emotions anymore.

"Wha'ever anyone says, ya saved me, Basara…"

"…Yeah, thanks."

It was a little salvation for him to have Yuki say that to him, even though what he did was unforgivable.

For him, who had committed a huge mistake and lost a great deal of people, to have protected someone despite all that.

"But I couldn't bear the responsibility for my actions… and still can't even now. I have no idea how to face it yet."

But, said Basara and declared.

Like addressing Toujou Basara's unwavering feelings to Yuki and himself.

"But Mio is… She's different from me. Facing her sad past, she still desperately tries to live on provident. She's trying to fight. And then we happened to meet. Of course there's the stuff with my dad's scheme and my initial anger about getting deceived. But--- The moment I came to know everything about it, I wanted to protect her. It's not just sympathy or a whim. I seriously want to protect her. Like you said, I certainly don't have the same power I had in the past anymore. And given my five years without training, I don't know how much of a help I can be. But you know, if the Heroes still can't protect her, can't fight for her, then I believe it's my role to do so. You see, therefore---"

At the time he got this far. A loud noise echoed through the café.

When Basara and Yuki looked it's way curious,

"M- My apologies."

Near the entrance of the café, a flustered waitress crouched on the floor.

Most likely she bumped into a customer and dropped her stainless tray with the cups.

As the customer hastily left the café, the door was still open.

Mio, who had rushed out of the café, desperately continued to run.

Running, running and running until she was out of breathe. Before long she suddenly rushed into a back alley. Right afterwards, Maria came after her hastily.

"M- Mio-samaa, do not run away so suddenly. It is dangerous to separate outsi--- Mio-sama?"

Maria rebuked while being out of breathe, but Mio didn't hear her voice.

Who could blame her. She had been at her limit.

If she had heard any more of Basara's words--- Mio would have cried without doubt.

She could tell that her face was red. It wasn't due to the curse of the Master and Servant Contract, nor due her full-power sprint.

"What now, Maria… How should I act towards Basara from now on?"

Her body trembled from agitation. She couldn't suppress her soaring emotions. Even though Mio was kind of a burden to Basara, he had made such a strong resolve.

She hadn't known. That Basara--- tried to protect her with such strong feelings.

"It is a good thing… Now we know that Basara-san is truly a kind person."

"But…"

Like this, she felt uneasy about involving Basara. But Maria shook her head.

"You do not need to worry. Basara-san's feelings are his own. What you need to do, Mio-sama, is not to show a strange reservation, but properly respond to Basara-san's feelings."

"Respond to… But how?"

"That is obvious. Open up your heart to him and trust him."

"J- Just that? Only something so simple?"

"Yes, indeed. Also, if you feel like doing something for him, I believe it is appropriate to do it."

"Me, doing something for him…"

What would it be? As expected, it was better to somehow express gratitude in such a case?

If so, what could she do? Inadvertently Mio lapsed into deep thoughts.

"---Ah, but"

Suddenly knitting her eyebrows as she remembered something, Maria brooded.

"His childhood friend at least could be a bit troublesome… We do not know what happened after we left the café, but Basara-san is generally a good person. Earlier they were holding hands and looking each other into the eyes. If she cries, or approaches him a bit more daring, Basara-san might unexpectedly fall under her spell…"

"M- More daring, she couldn't be… They're in public."

She tried to deny that possibility, but Mio remembered the incident from this morning in class.

Right. Thinking back on it, Yuki was the kind of girl that would openly hug him in public. Her greeting on their reunion. It wouldn't be strange for her to do even more to keep Basara.

…M- More than just hugging him… N- No way.

Not good. That didn't leave room for many possibilities.

"O, Oh no… What do we do, Maria?"

When Mio asked with her wanton imagination, Maria showed an over-confident expression again.

"Mio-sama, do not be intimidated. You have to go on the attack."

"H- How?"

Maria laughed a Fufu to Mio's question for a solution.

"Please leave it to me--- I know a very good method!"

Part 6

In the end, Basara and Yuki never got on the same wavelength afterwards.

No matter what Basara said, Yuki wouldn't accept it. No matter how much Yuki persuaded him, Basara wouldn't back off from his standpoint. The sun had completely set when they left the café and a last quarter moon hung in the sky. Just like the other people hurrying home, Basara and Yuki started walking too.

"…I hope this cheers her up even a bit."

Basara mumbled while dropping his gaze on the cake that he bought at the café as a present.

Later, when he gets home, he would have to explain to Mio and Maria without doubt. He likely would get a lecture too. When he inadvertently felt dejected, the figure that should be next to him had suddenly vanished.

"…Mh? What's up, Yuki?"

When he turned around, Yuki had stopped a few steps behind. And,

"…It's no use. Both Jin-san and you are no longer part of the village… I don't think you can win against the current Devil Lord faction by yourself."

"Might be… But we're fine as long as we don't lose. The enemy isn't after Mio's life, but after the power sleeping inside of her."

"Besides," said Basara.

"They're currently keeping it an internal struggle, since they don't want things to go out of hands. Thus my dad and I become Jokers. We certainly might no longer be Heroes, but we still have power to fight. I imagine the enemy will think twice before acting. It's possible that they think the Hero Tribe would act for revenge once they laid hands on us."

If so, then it was more than likely that they could manage by themselves.

"But…"

"Yeah, of course that won't actually happen. The village treats my dad and me as non-existent after chasing us out."

For the village, his dad and him were no longer comrades, nor humans worth of their protection. Even if they were to die, the village would surely just keep observing.

"But I don't really care. I don't intend to drag you or the village into our fight."

Either way, he had to protect Mio right now. Even if it was only temporarily or buying time.

Meanwhile Jin would have to stop the enemy. And if that wasn't possible, then he would group up with Jin and think of a new plan. ---But.

"…That's impossible."

Yuki's quiet voice denied Basara's words. Why--- was what Basara wanted to ask, but before that Basara saw the brimming aura around Yuki's body that appeared when a Hero released his power.

And then, a shrill noise echoed. Yuki had instantly quick-drawn her materialized spirit sword. Just like Basara's magic sword Brynhildr, the spirit sword armoured Yuki's arm up to her elbow. Using the spirit sword, which couldn't be seen by normal eyes, Yuki brought forth an invisible slashing blade.

Basara saw it cutting through "something" that was hidden in empty space.

"Just now…"

"A low-class stray devil. You haven't noticed it, Basara, but the Devil Lord's power in Naruse Mio slowly attracts them more and more. Currently it's not grave, but in time it might attract ones that hurt people."

While Yuki quietly cancelled her aura and spirit sword,

"If Naruse Mio's existence brings harm to those around her--- the village will immediately make her an termination target. I believe, it won't be that far off."

"Yuki…"

Basara inadvertently reached out his hand, but Yuki softly avoided it.

Her sad-looking eyes looked straight at Basara.

"If that happens, I won't hold back--- Even if you'll hate me for it."

Then Yuki turned on her heels and went away like that.

Leaving Basara behind, who just stood there saying nothing.

Part 7

When Basara returned home, he called for Mio and Maria right away and explained his relation to Yuki.

From Yuki being a Hero and their reunion after five years to the fact that he turned down her request of leaving Mio at the café, he told them everything thoroughly.

He was worried if she would listen to him due to her bad mood, but surprisingly Mio, as well as Maria, listened obediently to him. And then ten-odd minutes passed with only Basara telling the story in order.

"Ehm… so, this is a cake that I bought at the café."

Basara, finishing his explanation faster than he had thought, timidly examining their expressions.

"………………." "………………."

The two girls remained silent in regards.

…Aw- Awkward…

The silence was too oppressive. Just like back then when they revealed their true identities and told Basara to leave the house.

"Uh- Uhm…"

Unable to withstand the silent pressure, Basara tried to get a reaction from them, whereupon

"…… Yes, I understand."

Finally Maria opened her mouth. Basara made a sigh of relief.

Mio next to him still stayed quiet, but he wouldn't ask for more.

"Y- You do? Good. Then let's have dinn---"

"---No, can you spare some time before that?"

With that, Maria cut into Basara's words.

"Actually, while you were talking with Nonaka-san, Mio-sama and myself were extremely worried. We thought you might get persuaded by Nonaka-san and abandon us… Right, Mio-sama?"

"---Eh? Yes, right."

When the conversation suddenly turned to her, Mio, who had remained silent so far, hastily nodded.

"My bad… But, I properly came back, see?"

"Indeed. But, when the date lasts until this late, I get worried if you maybe have been convinced by her… What about you, Mio-sama?"

"Y- Yes… right."

Mio agreed.

"No, it wasn't a date, but just a normal conversation…"

"---Can you prove it?"

"? Proof… what?"

"You need to ask? Proof that you have not betrayed us."

Don't ask for the impossible with a smug face. As if there's such a thing.

"You can only believe in me for that…"

"Please do not misunderstand. We do trust you, Basara-san. Yes, indeed we do."

said Maria with a slightly exaggerated tone.

"The thing is, we would like to have more faith in you, Basara-san. As comrades in arms, we would like to deepen our bonds of trust. That is all… Right, Mio-sama?"

"Y- Yes… As she said."

Really? For a while now, it sounded like a third-rate play though.

…Still.

Over the course of things, they had formed a Master and Servant Contract, but Basara too was concerned about their mutual trust. With Jin out of the house, he would like to reduce possible worries as much as possible with regard to the future. It seemed Mio and Maria wanted Basara to do something for them. The absurd request of showing proof that he didn't betray them was most likely leading up to that.

…Mhm.

It would be favorable if something he did could reassure them. Then,

"I somehow get your point. ---So? What do you want me to do?"

Upon that, Maria smiled. And then she slowly beckoned Basara.

"I am glad you say that. Well then, Basara-san, please come over here."

"…How did it come to this?"

At the place Maria took him to, Basara mumbled in pure incomprehension.

Right now, Basara was in a space with white steam--- The bath. With only a towel around his waist, Basara was sitting on the plastic chair with his elbows on his lap while resting his chin on his hands. There,

"Is that not obvious?"

A bright voice came from the bathtub. It was Maria, the mastermind behind this, while she looked at him with her chin resting on her hands that were on the edge of the bathtub.

"The only way to deepen one's bonds in this world is to get naked together."

"That's only for the same gender. Why would you do it co-ed?"

When the opposites sexes got naked together, it was just an erotic situation.

"What is the problem? Cramped together nearly completely naked in a small room--- sharing the same shame will bring results even if you are against it. You can treat another person kindly once you know his pain."

"What's with this licking each other's wounds mentality! Or rather, there's no point in forced results!"

"Not quite, Basara-san. A girl's 'No' means 'Yes'."

Or, said Maria.

"Could it be you dislike taking a bath with a girl?"

"No, I wouldn't say dislike…"

There was no way he would dislike it as a healthy high school boy. Still, even boys needed to mentally prepare themselves at times.

---Earlier, Maria had taken Basara to the anteroom of the bath.

There she had taken off her clothes and said to the bewildered Basara.

"---Now then, let us all take a bath together."

He had no clue what was going on. It was just too out of context. Basara instantly tried to decline, but she told him "I cannot trust you when we do not take a bath together". Moreover, he had thought for sure that Mio would oppose, but she locked the door of the anteroom and sealed his escape route, telling him "…Please, go in with us". It looked like they would strip him down, so Basara resigned. He agreed to go in with them and reluctantly took off his clothes by himself.

Back-to-back and the towel covering his precious part, he had thought they wouldn't see it, but the shame of it still wasn't to be underestimated. His accelerated heartbeat surely wasn't just from the hot air in the bath. And opposite to the composed Maria, Mio seemed to be feeling the same as Basara.

"…….."

In the bathtub--- next to Maria, she flushed her cheeks in shame. A natural reaction.

She was still clad in a bath towel, but her big breasts would surely float in the water. The knot of the towel had been on the verge to come untied right away, so she had held up the towel with her hands at first, but in time she had given up and rested her breasts on the edge of the bathtub. In a posture that emphasized the volume of her breasts to the limit.

…That was foul play…

Even under normal circumstances it was already a trial for the reasoning of a boy in his teens to take a bath together with a girl, yet these breasts were tempting him even more. After all, Basara had already felt them up directly.

---The incredible soft sensation that drove a boy crazy.

Not to forget her embarrassed expression of biting down on her lips and her skin colored in a faint pink. Everything about Mio right now was erotic. Against his will, Basara ended up remembering the night when the contract was formed.

"Now then--- How about you wash Basara-san's back, Mio-sama?"

Maria, in the bathtub, suggested the unbelievable.

"---Eh? No need. I can wash myself."

"That will not do. It would defy the meaning of taking a bath together."

Basara tried to decline, but Maria declared decisively.

"Of course you can wash your back by yourself. However, here you should dare to openly expose your back to us--- That is precisely what trust is about, just like entrusting your backs to each other in a fight."

And then,

"Mio-sama and myself will properly wash your back for you--- But not only will we wash it, we will also respond to the trust of exposing your back to us. You can only trust someone, who openly exposes his back. Getting naked together in the bath, precisely a situation where you defenselessly bare your lives to each other builds up a mutual trust, would you not agree?"

"Uhh…"

After being told something reasonable, Basara was at a loss for words and sighed a 'HAH' before long.

"…Okay. If it makes you trust me, go ahead."

He was already sitting on the chair anyway. When he agreed and left his back to them,

"Y- Yeah… Got it."

Mio slowly got out of the bathtub and moved behind Basara.

After moving behind Basara, Mio sat down on the bath floor with her knees bent with her legs neatly side by side.

Then she soaked the sponge with the body soap.

"I, I'll start now…"

With a nervous expression, she started to wash Basara's back. It was her first time washing a boy's back. She already thought so to herself when she rode the bicycle behind him, but

…This is what a boy's back feels like.

It was broader than her own and more than anything it was sturdy from the muscles. Basara's body, which could still bring out incredible fighting skills in actual combat as he was a Hero in the past, was scarred all over. He most likely got them from training and actual combats. Each of the wounds were old.

Even Mio's eyes, inexperienced in that prospect, could tell that this body of his was well trained. Therefore she could comprehend that he cut down the enemy with one swing of his huge magic sword.

Naruse Mio realized once more. That she was saved by this person without doubt.

"…What's up?"

"Eh? N- No, nothing."

Asked by Basara doubtfully, Mio hastily started to move her stopped hand.

---Upon that, there suddenly was something in the edge of Mio's vision. It was Maria's expression as she was looking over from the bathtub. That expression clearly was criticizing her.

…I, I get it…

Mio remembered the words that Maria had told her before Basara came home.

It was an idea so that Yuki wouldn't steal Basara--- Maria's secret plan.

---At the café, Basara declared strongly that he would protect Mio. that surely were his true feelings.

And even now, he was openly entrusting his back to Mio. This showed that Basara trusted Mio. Then, she herself had to respond to that.

"…."

Mio cleared her throat with a gulp and unravelled the knot of the towel she was wearing. What if he turned around now--- While thinking like that, Mio got completely naked and brought her body closer to Basara's back. What first touched it was the part of Mio's body that inevitably stood out the most.

Her breasts.

"? H- Hey!?"

"---D- Don't move!!"

Basara raised a surprised voice and tried to get away, whereas Mio stopped him with an even louder voice.

"Please, stay like that… If you move, I'll kill you a hundred times."

Mio declared with a frail voice to the completely petrified Basara.

It was incredible embarrassing for her as well. Still, if this prevented Yuki from stealing Basara, then she could somehow withstand this level of embarrassment.

---Mio was told by Maria that her breasts were an effective weapon against Basara.

And indeed. Compared to girls her age, Mio's breasts were rather--- no, quite big.

At school or on the streets, she often felt the gazes of men not only to her face, but on her breasts too.

She never thought of that as a happy circumstance, but at least now it was different.

These breasts certainly were a weapon that Yuki lacked.

…Basara…

Mio looked. At the petrified Basara's upper body, which had become bright red from a rush of blood.

Basara was conscious of her--- For some reason that made her incredible happy. Mio took the body soap bottle, poured the contents amply onto her breasts and made it foam.

"…."

She pressed her breasts determined onto him again, then started to sliding wash his back.

Upon that, Mio's voluminous breasts filled the muscle cavities on Basara's back with their movements, surprisingly lewdly changing shape. Gaining an unexpected shame, soon enough there started to be a change in Mio's body. What slowly welled up from inside her body was a sweet tickling heat.

…Mm, Ah…

Suddenly Mio noticed that the tip of her breasts were tense. She ended up feeling it herself.

That embarrassment flared up Mio's whole body with heat, colouring her body in a bright red very fast.

---But, Mio didn't remove her breasts from Basara's back. Because Basara was behaving embarrassed. Albeit not voicing it out, his body was clearly hot. Without doubt, Basara was only feeling conscious of Mio right now. That fact made Mio feel unsurpassable bliss.

…Basara…Basaraa…

Was this an effect from the Master and Servant Contract too? Normally, she absolutely wouldn't do something so indecent. Yet she was proud of herself of going this far for Basara--- for her Master.

"Mm… Fuh, Ah… Mm"

At some point, Mio entwined her arms around Basara's front and pressed onto him from behind as much as possible, immersing herself in sliding her breasts on the back in front of her eyes. Each time Mio moved, the foaming bubbles made a lewd and sticky sound. And when Mio's breasts had went all over Basara's back,

"…I, I think it's all clean now…"

Basara said flustered at his limits. Mio raised her drowsy face.

"W- Well… I just got a bit hungry. We hadn't had dinner yet. And I bought the cake and all."

So it's about time we go out--- was what Basara was trying to say.

"---Ah, no problem. I thought this might happen, so I brought your cake with me."

Wherever she pulled it out from, Maria held up the white paper box with the cake in it.

Then she swiftly opened the box, took a short cake and got out of the bathtub.

"Here, Basara-san… Say 'Ah'."

"W- Wait! Why did you bring the cake into the bath!?"

That's too novel, screamed Basara to stop Maria and their hands collided.

"Aw…"

The cake fell from Maria's hand onto Basara's shoulder, then dropped down from his upper arm to his elbow, lastly landing on the floor. The white fresh cream and sponge cake stained Basara's skin sticky.

"S- See, eating cake in the bath is too high level!"

So let's wash up quickly and get out, said Basara.

"---No, please wait. This is the cake you specially bought for us."

Maria stopped Basara and sat down on the floor next to him. Then,

"Wh- What are you doing?"

"You need to ask? ---I will gladly eat it up."

Maria told the bewildered Basara so without hesitation and started to lick up the fresh cream on his arm.

"UWAAAAH!?"

"Please stay still. I have to at least eat the portion that did not drop to the floor, or I would feel sorry for the cake."

Maria said nonchalant and licked over her lips like saying "Well done". Then,

"It is delicious, Mio-sama--- If you like, could you take care of the portion on his shoulder?"

"Eh…?"

Being told that, Mio looked at Basara's shoulder in front of her. It was the first place the cake fell onto, so it had plenty of fresh cream on it. Mio stared at it, like sucking it in.

"Hey, Mio… Don't tell me, you too…"

Basara was saying something, but it didn't reach Mio's ears right now.

---Before she noticed it, Mio had brought her lips closer to Basara and let her tongue roam.

The fresh cream with Basara's body temperature was surprisingly sweet. After tasting it plentiful on her tongue, she mixed it with accumulated thick saliva in her mouth and swallowed it down at once.

When she cleared her throat with gulp, she felt bewitching sensation slowly slipping down in her body. It was like tickling her body from the inside. Mio let her body tremble in a shiver to this pleasure and soon enough leaked a passionate "Ahh…" moan.

---And then, she couldn't stop herself anymore.

Entering a delirium, Mio continued to lick up the fresh cream on Basara. It was delicious. Above all, while she licked Basara, her skin pressed onto him, making everything, her breasts, her stomach and her arms even more sensitive than before.

Even after all the fresh cream was gone, Mio licked Basara's body and rubbed her own body against his.

A switch had completely been switched inside of Mio and she called Basara "Brother, Brother" numerous times.

At that time--- Basara suddenly stood up there and then.

"…You two."

Toujou Basara said with a low voice while looking down on Mio and Maria, who sat on the floor of the bath.

He didn't know if they were teasing him or testing his trust, but--- Mio and Maria were cute girls while Basara was a boy. Even under normal circumstances he often ended up seeing them as normal girls instead of family members while living together and had suppressed his feelings so far. Yet when they pulled a stunt like this that completely ignored his troubles, he certainly hit his limit.

Along with anger, his reasoning blew away.

"Fine… If that's what you want, then don't come crying to me later."

As soon as declaring so, Basara hung over Mio and Maria.

"Yahn… Basara, Broth-, Noo." "B- Basara-san, c- calm down."

Both of them hastily raised flustered voice, but it was too late. While holding them down, Basara squashed the remaining cakes in his hands and besmeared it over their bodies. Starting with their soft breasts, bottoms and thighs, he smeared the fresh cream, chocolate and strawberry mousse all over their bodies, then started to taste their sweet-painted skin with his tongue. Mio and Maria protest with damp voices, but Basara paid it no mind. In the bath, which was filled with a suffocating sweet fragrance, he licked Maria's body while fondling Mio's breasts or fiercely sucked on Mio's whole body while grabbing Maria's bottom.

Upon that, they initially showed a bit of resistance, but after a while they accepted Basara and raised alluring voices. Naturally. Basara was Mio's Master and Maria was Mio's subordinate. When Basara felt like doing so, the two of them had no right to protest.

And then--- laying the two of them with completely spellbound expressions next to each other on the floor,

"So that you never do such lascivious things again, I'll subjugate you thoroughly."

Basara reached out his hand slowly and tried to perfectly make them his.

There--- He awakened.

It was not like he returned to his senses. He simply woke up from a dream now.

He wasn't in the bath, but on his bed.

"Eh? It… was a… dream…?"

Basara was inadvertently dumbfounded and made a big sigh before long.

Good. If that had been reality, Basara would have been a real brute.

"Ahh… Good. It was all a dream."

Saying so, he made a sigh of relief. At that time.

"No, Basara-san--- It was reality until halfway."

Basara was startled by that voice. Then he finally realized that he was laying while embracing Maria. But, it was softer and warmer than any hugging pillow.

"Eh…? That just now, was reality until halfway?"

On his nervous question, Maria laughed with Fufu.

"Have you forgotten it? It really surprised me, when you suddenly stood up and then collapsed with an incredible nosebleed. The CSI would get an unbelievable luminal reaction in our bath."

"…I, I see."

That it was only reality halfway was a bit nagging in itself, but it meant that Basara didn't really do anything to Mio and Maria. Apparently he escaped from the worst case.

"Uhm--- By the way, Basara-san."

Maria said with a renewed tone.

"Could you remove your hand from my bottom now?"

"Eh? …--- Uwaah!?"

Basara's hands entwined around Maria's back and grabbing her cute bottom. Moreover, when he hastily tried to remove his hands, he noticed that his hands were touching her bottom directly under her underwear. Basara hastily pulled out his hands from her shorts, then took a distance by leaping back on the bed.

"S- Sorry…"

"No, it was my fault for crawling into your bed, Basara-san."

After Maria said so to the flustered Basara, she showed a roguish smile.

"But, unconsciously putting your hands into a girl's underwear while you sleep… This assertive side of you surprised me. But well, you were having such a dream after all."

"Eh… That earlier dream wasn't your doing?"

A succubus was a female devil that trapped males in a cage of pleasure by showing them lewd dream.

She seemed to know the contents of it and even said that she crawled into his bed by herself. So he had thought for sure that dream was shown to him by her magic, but

"By no means. That was your own dream, Basara-san. I only took a little peek at it. Besides, if it had been a dream from my magic power, you would not have subjugated Mio-sama and myself, but would have been made to listen to our every word by seducing you mercilessly."

"Ugh… Right."

"No, no, I was surprised as well. Dreams represent one's desire or deep psyche, but to think your dream would look like that… You might have a surprisingly brutish sadist side to you."

"As if…"

He didn't even want to imagine it. Basara became weary, then

"…Reminds me, where's Mio?"

"She was worried about you after your collapse, but she has already gone to bed by now."

On his question, Maria told him outright. When he suddenly looked at the clock on the wall, it was already the middle of the night, 2 a.m.. Apparently quite some time had passed since he collapsed in the bath.

"I see… But good timing, I guess."

He was concerned about what had been reality and what a dream earlier, but Basara decided to ignore that for now. Because there was something he wanted to talk about with Maria without Mio hearing it.

"Maria… There's something I want to discuss with you."

"? What is the matter?"

Maria asked back puzzled, whereas Basara slowly opened his mouth.

It was the matter that he skipped when he told the two the whole story about Yuki after his return home.

A matter he didn't want Mio to hear. While talking to Maria, Basara ended up clenching his fists at some point.

He remembered Yuki's words on their separation.

…Like hell will I let that happen.

The Devils after the Devil Lord power sleeping inside of Mio were plenty enough for enemies.

To make an enemy even out of Yuki--- out of the Hero Tribe, he wouldn't let that happen.

Part 8

On the school grounds of Hijirigasaka Academy, the bell chimed, ending of the fourth period.

On her seat by the window, Mio sighed in relief.

…Now it's lunch break.

Just a bit longer, she said to herself. When she got through today, a Friday, tomorrow would be Saturday, a holiday. Thinking so, she felt a bit better.

---The curse of the Master and Servant Contract activates from guilty feelings towards the Master. However, the condition for it's activation were rather disadvantage for Mio. She knew that Basara seriously tried to protect her, but despite that, some part of Mio still couldn't be honest with him.

Moreover, she unbelievably acted out character in front of Basara the other day in the bath.

Together with the shame from that, she sometimes ended up behaving cranky on reflex.

…Still.

At home, it was not a problem. Because the three of them knew the circumstances and could act with not activating the curse in mind.

---However, it was different for the school, where there were others that didn't know of their circumstances.

If she carelessly acted unnatural or awkward, others would doubt her. Ideally it would be best to not get involved with Basara at school, but that said, when it looked like she was unnaturally avoiding him or cold to him, it just so happened that she would get a guilty consciousness.

And in that moment--- the curse would already activate. The mark that appeared on her neck then was magical and thus couldn't be seen by normal humans, but she couldn't count the times she nevertheless hid in the toilet or infirmary in the last few days anymore. The sole ray of hope would be that her dishonest behaviour didn't activate such a strong curse. If she patiently waited for the surges to pass, it would cease after a few minutes.

"---Hey Basacchi~ Let's go grab some food."

Suddenly she saw her classmate Takigawa approach Basara in her field of vision.

"Sure, gimme a sec."

Basara gave a reply, then put away his textbook and notebook inside his deck and stood up.

"Where to today?" "Cafeteria, I say. The A-Set will be richer than usual since it's the end of week."

While having a natural talk, Basara and Takigawa left the classroom.

On the first day of his transfer, Basara didn't make an enemy out of just his classmates, but out of half of the boys in school. Mio was partly responsibility for that, so she was a bit worried, but apparently he managed to make a friend just fine.

Well--- That nickname was dubious though

…The problem is.

Mio shifted her gaze to the other reason of Basara's isolation. The foremost seat in the same window row as Mio. The girl sitting there watched Basara leaving the classroom.

A beautiful girl with a cold aura. It was Nonaka Yuki, Basara's childhood friend and a Hero.

Yuki, watching Basara's back with longing eyes, suddenly noticed Mio's look.

"------"

Turning her expression into a cold one without emotions, she left the classroom like that.

…Completely opposite from before.

On Basara's transfer, Yuki had hugged onto Basara on their reunion. A bold action that surprised anyone nearby. Even doing something like that, Yuki stayed composed. Therefore--- She had thought for sure that Yuki would make more passes at Basara the next day, but against her expectations, Yuki didn't get involved with Basara anymore. Their seats were next to each other, but they hardly ever talked.

---She heard that Basara and Yuki didn't reach an agreement on their discussion at the café the other day.

That surely was the reason. The clueless others were confused by the sudden change.

…It's my fault, isn't it.

Basara, who tried to protect Mio, and Yuki, an outsider. The opinions of the close childhood friends stood in direct opposition to each other, which resulted in their current affair.

But. As her seat was behind theirs, Mio ended up seeing it. Even if Yuki didn't talk to him, even if she seemed to be cold. She was thinking of Basara. Occasionally, she looked at him.

And--- It was the same for Basara. Basara too was concerned about Yuki in some way.

…I wonder why it is.

That when she watched these two, it kind of hurt around her chest.

It was painful. Mio suddenly dropped her gaze to her desk.

"Naruse-san~ Let's have lunch." "If we don't hurry, all seats will be taken."

Bright voices called out to her. Therefore.

"…Yeah, I'm coming."

Mio stopped pondering further and slowly stood up from her seat.

In the end, school ended without the curse activating even once that day.

When Mio made a sigh of relief, Basara came over right after picking up his bag.

"Okay, let's go home." "Y- Yeah…"

Mio mumbled and stood up. At that time.

"---Nonaka, and Toujou, got a minute?"

Their homeroom teacher Sakasaki called the two to a stop. Basara asked "What is it, Sensei?" by turning around.

"Sorry, but I want you two to help me organize the summer vacation assignments."

said Sakasaki with a refreshing smile.

"Wh- Why Basara too? That stuff is the class rep, Nonaka… -san's responsibility."

Mio uttered objection.

"Well, you have a point, but Toujou's transfer spared him from the assignment. So when he helps out with some odd jobs, it'll make it fair to the other students."

said Sakasaki. Basara scratched his head.

"Mhm… Yeah, guess so."

Therefore,

"---So, Mio, will you wait until we're done? Or…"

Call Maria and go home with her, huh.

Basara's words were reasonable. But--- the second choice somehow gave Mio a bitter feeling in her heart. The restless feeling from the lunch break when she saw Basara and Yuki resurfaced.

After all. Either way, it didn't change the fact that Basara would help out Yuki.

Waiting for them to finish would mean that she took a backseat to helping Yuki. And going home with Maria would look like Basara chose helping Yuki over her. She didn't want that.

"---Mio?"

Mio looked at Basara, who looked at her inquiring.

Originally there were only two choices. But if she were to propose going home alone.

Instead of Yuki, Basara would choose---

….No! What am I thinking…

Not good. She had a nasty idea just now.

This is just like--- I'm not trusting Basara. The moment she thought so,

""Ah---…"

The curse of the Master and Servant Contract activated. Self-loathing from jealousy. It was one of the most extreme guilty feelings. Feeling the heat raising inside her body--- Mio could no longer stand.

Like that she suddenly was about to collapse.

"Don't tell me--- Whoops!"

Basara, noticing her state, hastily supported Mio's body. With just that,

"----!"

Mio trembled her body with a shiver. Right after, her breathing got rough.

"H- Hey, are you okay, Naruse…? Are you anemic or something?"

"Yeah--- Excuse me, I'll take her to the infirmary."

Basara replied to Takigawa, then he lifted up Mio and said with a voice only she could hear.

"…Bear with it for a bit."

After mumbling so, he rushed out of the classroom at once.

Basara took Mio to the infirmary, but apparently the nurse was absent.

No helper was there either and all the beds were empty. It was completely deserted.

But that was convenient for Basara and he laid Mio onto one of the three beds.

"…Are you okay?"

On the curtained off bed, Mio replied by just nodding while seemingly having a hard time.

…Geez.

Something must have activated the curse, but at this point she could only endure it for a few minutes until the effect ceased. But,

"Ah… Mm, Fuh… Mmg…"

While enduring the riling up sensation, Mio bit down on her lips to prevent her moaning. Her cheeks got red and dampened. Her breasts, so big that they were recognizable over her clothes, moved up and down many times over.

…This is…

Not good. If he were to keep watching, he would get truly nasty thoughts.

"…Ehm, I'll go outside for a bit. It must be embarrassing for you to have me stay here."

Saying so, he turned his back to her, whereupon

"…P- Please… Don't leave… me…"

"No, but… …Okay. I'll stay. So stop looking at me like that."

'Cause it made him feel weird. It looked like the curse was stronger than usually. But,

"But sorry… At least let me keep my back to you."

If he were to look at the current Mio, it seemed that his reasoning would be blown away.

Without saying anything, Mio tightly grabbed Basara's clothes--- the sleeve of his left arm.

Basara, taking that as a sign of her approval, sat down on a chair besides the bed with his back to her.

In the infirmary with just the two of them, only Mio's erotic moaning sounded.

Then, Mio's breathing calm down before long. The effect of the curse seemed to be fading.

"…How's it? Feel better now?"

When he turned around, Mio let go of his sleeve she was grabbing and placed the back of her hand on her forehead.

"Mm… I think, it calmed down… a bit."

Saying so, she slowly straightened up her body.

"Still, how did this happen…?"

He recalled the conversation in the classroom earlier, but there was nothing that would make Mio have a guilty consciousness towards him. The curse was supposed to not activate as long as she didn't think bad of him. However, if there were other conditions for the curse activating,

…Then we need to think of a counter-measure.

When Basara was present like this time, he could back her up, but if the curse were to activate while Mio was alone or rather in the middle of a battle, Basara and Maria couldn't help her even if they were with her.

But on Basara's question,

"…Wh- Who knows. I suddenly got irritated by you… that's all."

Mio said so and averted her gaze pouting.

"What the…"

Basara inadvertently lost his strength. There was nothing he could do about that.

That reason was too unreasonable. Of course the curse would activate strongly then. Basara made a sigh.

"If it has calmed down, you're alright now…? Then I'll go back first."

Since it was an emergency, he had abandoned the task from Sakasaki.

"Eh---…?"

Instantly, Mio made a surprised face. Then,

"…You're leaving?"

Mio's eyes, flickering with unrest, looked up to Basara.

Basara scratched his cheek with "Ehm" on the unexpected upturned gaze.

"Well… You know, I can't let Yuki do… the task from the teacher all by herself."

Besides,

"The curse has calmed down for now, right? Then---"

"…..Not yet."

Mio mumbled isolated.

"---Eh? Is that so?"

Not yet… but didn't she say it calmed down a bit a moment ago?

Ah, but the mark certainly was still on her neck. Though quite some time had already passed.

"…Hey, Basara. I'm… having a hard time."

She jerkily pulled on his sleeve again to check his intentions.

"Well… If you say so…"

Basara inadvertently turned red and spoke evasively. After all, he knew what Mio wanted to say.

---Truth be told, there was just one way to cancel the curse at once.

The curse of the Master and Servant Contract was activated from the Servant's mental betrayal of his Master.

In that case, if she was forcefully made to remember her loyalty--- if she was to be subjugated, the curse would lift.

In other words, he had to do the same thing he did as back then when he saved Mio, who rejected the contract at first.

"But, you don't want that again, right? Much less in the infirmary at school…"

"….Yeah. B- But… if you, Basara… Brother wants to do it, I'm… fine with it."

"Eh---?"

Basara inadvertently asked back. It shouldn't be his place to decide, since it was Mio, who was in pain.

He tried to say that, yet Mio called Basara "Brother" with wet eyes.

It was the sign that Mio wanted Basara to do a certain thing. Basara couldn't say anything more.

Mio thought for sure she would avert her eyes. Actually, her cheeks were red. She was embarrassed.

She clearly understood what she had said.

But--- despite that, Mio did not avert her eyes from Basara. Her engulfing eyes. Before she noticed it, Basara had slowly reached out his hand. When he softly touched her cheek,

"…..Mm."

Mio reacted with a shiver and closed her eyes. But, she brought her cheek closer like that to lean it into Basara's palm. When he felt Mio's warmth through his palm, Mio softly opened her eyes.

Even without words, her eyes were speaking volumes. Therefore he had to make his resolve.

"…Okay."

Basara said just that, then loosened the ribbon on Mio's uniform.

"Ah…"

Mio's voice filled with a bit of happiness in all the embarrassment.

"---I'll set you at ease right away."

Saying so to her, Basara reached out his hand for her body.

At the same time his fingertips touched her--- the door of the infirmary suddenly opened clattering.

""---!?"" Hastily jumping back, Basara and Mio took a distance from each other.

"…Mh? What are you guys doing?"

A woman in a white robe looked at them from the entrance. And then, she suddenly noticed Mio.

"Oh, Naruse… Anemic again?"

"Y- Yes, Hasegawa-sensei…"

While hastily covering her chest, Mio nodded, whereupon the woman came over. Apparently she was the nurse. He knew of the infirmary, but as he had never used it, it was his first meeting with her. Still,

…What a beauty.

Beautiful features, a good figure and a nice aura. A stunning beauty in all aspects. Her breasts were even bigger than Mio's and matched her sexy voice, albeit with a manly tone, her feminine charm stood out alluring. Her appearance of walking with her robe fluttering looked quite stunning as well.

"…Your chaperon? Though he isn't a first aid helper."

Upon that, the merciless gaze of the nurse called Hasegawa pierced Basara.

"No, I'm…" "Sensei, he's…"

Right away, Basara and Mio raised their voices in harmony.

"I know. Toujou, right? You transferred here just recently."

"You know me?"

Hasegawa nodded a "Yeah" to the surprised Basara, then pointed with her chin towards Mio.

"She and Nonaka in your class are quite popular with the boys… So I have a heard a few rumours about you. How does it feel to make all boys your enemy on your first day, Mr. Lady-killer?"

"I knew it, such rumours were spreading…"

Like that, it would take quite some time to make friends besides Takigawa. There Hasegawa laughed.

"Be careful. Intentionally or not, when you stand out more than others, it naturally makes you a target. And not necessarily one of affection. People hate those who are greatly different from them or have what they lack. Also, different from physiologically neighbor-hate, instinctive feelings like jealousy or fear have an amplitude. Simple on one hand, but troublesome when compounding."

"….Right."

On Hasegawa's words, Basara nodded with a depressed tone. Basara painfully understood what she meant from experiences in the past. And right now, Hasegawa's words applied to Mio as well.

Because she was chased by the current Devil Lord for the Devil Lord's power that she inherited from her father.

"…What am I supposed to do when I make enemies unwanted?"

When he said so, along with a bitter smile that resembled self derision, Hasegawa said "It's easy" readily.

"If you made enemies, you just have to make even more allies. Then you can win against them and naturally the other party will avoid a conflict with you."

"Well… But all the boys in the school seem to be my enemy."

"The 'amount' isn't important for enemies or allies. The 'quality' is."

"Well, that might be true…"

Currently, the only one speaking to Basara was Takigawa. No matter how good his quality was, it certainly couldn't cover the overwhelming difference in numbers.

…Well, I don't care.

The problem was the situation involving Mio. Yuki also warned him about it, but it was difficult for them alone to oppose the current Devil Lord faction. According to Jin, there was a chance for Mio not getting chased, but there was no guarantee it would work out well.

Quality over quantity. That was certainly true, but at times it was just a mere consolation.

Right now, the enemy refrained from doing anything flashy to prevent the Hero Tribe from interfering, so they could manage a resistance for now. However, if they forcefully outnumbered them without thinking of the consequences, they couldn't hope to win. Even though he--- decided to protect her.

"---Don't misunderstand the meaning of 'quality',"

A voice that saw through his doubts sounded. When he raised his head,

"You don't get it? I'm saying you can't weigh the odds of 'amount' and 'quality'."

Saying so, Hasegawa laughed. But, then suddenly the school broadcast sounded.

"Hasegawa-sensei, please come to the staff room at once. I repeat---"

"…Oh, right."

Hasegawa said so wearily and headed for her own desk on the opposite wall from the beds.

Then she took out documents from the drawer.

"Sorry, I have to attend a meeting for a while. Naruse, I can't look after you, but if you want, you can rest here a bit longer--- Also, Toujou,"

Saying so, she threw something silver to him. Basara promptly caught it.

"It's the key for the infirmary. I'll tell the teachers about it, so lock the door and return the key later."

After saying so, Hasegawa left the room as gallant as she had come.

Then she suddenly stopped at the door with "Ah, I forgot…".

"You might not know since you transferred here, so I'll tell you--- I hate idiots, Toujou. I don't care if you can't study, but I don't like cleaning up after idiots. You're at that age, so I won't tell you to not screw around, but that's a sickbed. At least do it somewhere where we teachers don't see it. There are various spots around like behind the school building or the gym storeroom."

""Wha---""

They thought they had hid it, but it was completely exposed. Basara and Mio inadvertently turned red.

"Teachers aren't gods. There are things we can do, and things we can't. But you know, when you, our students, at least abide by the school rules to a minimum, then I'll properly protect you. I know you want to have a merry youth, but… don't do anything that makes us turn against you."

Saying so, Hasegawa left the room this time for sure.

"…….." "…….."

Basara and Mio were dumbfounded for a while, then Basara's cell phone suddenly rang.

The name displayed on the screen was Takigawa. When he pressed the call button,

"Yo, Basacchi, still in the infirmary?"

He could hear a bright voice through the phone near his ear. When Basara replied with "Yeah",

"Really? The broadcast called for Hasegawa, but are you guys fine?"

"No problem. She lent us the key."

"I see. Good then… Ah, don't worry about Sakasaki's request. Nonaka and I will do it."

"Wait, that's my---"

Basara started to talk, when he suddenly met Mio's eyes. And then,

"-------"

He saw Mio cast down her eyes. With an expression of giving up on something.

Therefore, Basara turned his back to Mio.

"….Never mind. Sorry, can I ask you to do it?"

"---Eh?"

While hearing a voice filled with surprise behind him, Basara told Takigawa over the phone.

"Thanks… I'll treat you to whatever you want next time."

To the positive reply, "Thanks a bunch. Tell Yuki and the teacher my apologies too…. Yeah, thanks."

Basara said so and hung up.

"…Are you sure?"

Mio said with a voice that she still couldn't believe it, whereas Basara turned around with "What else can I do".

"You said you're still in pain. Still, we can't continue from earlier, but I can't leave you alone now either. So I'll stay with you until you're all better."

"…Really?"

Mio asked worried.

"Yeah. The nurse lent us the key, so take the chance to get a good rest."

In addition to always being careful of an enemy attack, she also had to concentrate of not letting the curse activate here. The stress must have built up. Thus the symptoms were stronger too.

"Here, lie down… I'll call Maria and tell her that we'll come home a bit later."

"O- Okay…"

Obeying his words, Mio laid down on the bed. While pulling the blanket over her,

"I'll stay by your side, so don't get irritated for no reason anymore."

"I, I get it!"

When Basara told her so, Mio turned red and pulled the blanket over her face.

Part 9

The atmosphere in the infirmary was unique. A soft, pleasant and most comfortable atmosphere in the school.

Next to Mio sleeping on the bed, Basara dozed off too at some point.

"….Mm."

When Basara suddenly woke up, the sun had already set and it was night. When he checked the time,

"8 o'clock… I slept quite a while."

He scratched his cheek. However, on a look, Mio was still sleeping soundly on the bed.

…A bit longer shouldn't hurt.

Hasegawa said she would tell the teachers about it. Seeing as no teacher came to look for them so far, it wasn't a problem that they still stayed on the school grounds.

Thus, Basara quietly left the infirmary as not to wake up Mio. Then he took out his cell phone and called Maria, where he told her that they would be coming home late. Upon that,

"---I understand. Then I will come to pick you up in a while."

She would come pick them up in an hour.

"Now then…"

Basara twisted his neck that was stiff from the sleep, then slowly walked down the hallway.

The school building at a summer night--- Amidst the tepid atmosphere, he headed for the school store. A human's body consumed water even when just sleeping. Specially in this season, it was easy to get a heatstroke or dehydration. Basara got thirsty, so he decided to buy some drinks, including for Mio for when she woke up.

When he arrived at the store, it had already closed long ago. Needless to say, there was no one around. But the lights were on. The lights of the vending machines in the corner faintly illuminated the dark store.

"That works…"

They must have been set up for the teachers that stayed behind until late in the night. Basara bought two sport drinks at the operational vending machines. At the moment he tried to drink his own.

"---Oh? That you, Basacchi?"

Suddenly his nickname was called from behind. There was only one person who called Basara like that. Therefore,

"Takigawa… you're still here?"

When Basara turned around, Takigawa entered the store by saying "Right back at you".

"I was doing the task from Sakasaki. We finished just a moment ago."

"It took you till now?"

If that was true, it occupied him for more than four hours.

Though Sakasaki said they would finish before it got dark with two people.

"No, the work itself was done pretty quick. After all, Nonaka worked without saying a single word. The silence was so awkward that I regret offering my help a bit."

Takigawa said.

"But when we finished the work, Sakasaki said he would treat us to some food, so we ordered without reservation, but it was unexpectedly much. You can't underestimate Rairaiken.[4] So, then I took a digestion nap."

So that how it was. Basara made a wry smile.

"Sorry, Takigawa. You really helped me out."

"No prob… Speaking of, was Naruse fine afterwards?"

"Well, kind of… She's still sleeping in the infirmary, but she's completely calmed down now."

"Glad to hear. It really surprised me that she suddenly collapsed."

But, said Takigawa.

"She looked a bit embarrassed with her cheeks red."

Ah, said Basara vaguely.

Her red face was due to the aphrodisiac effect, but she was embarrassed without doubt.

That said, he couldn't really tell Takigawa about that.

"Anyway, thank you. Like promised, I'll treat you next time--- Will Rairaiken be fine?"

"Ugh… Anything but that." Takigawa said with a grimace.

"---Reminds me, Basacchi, have you seen Nonaka?"

"Yuki…? No, I haven't."

Takigawa stayed at school until now because he ate too much. Yuki wouldn't do something like that. Therefore he had thought for sure she had gone home already, but

"Huh? Strange… She was going to check up on you guys."

"Really?"

At least while Basara was in the infirmary, Yuki didn't come by… probably.

There was a possibility that she left without calling out to them out of consideration to their sleep, but--- No, even when Basara was sleeping, he wasn't so insensitive that he would keep sleeping soundly when someone entered the room. If so, then they missed each other on his way here?

But, he got the feeling that it wasn't a good idea to leave the two--- Mio and Yuki all alone at this point.

"Sorry, Takigawa. I gotta go back---"

Saying so, he started walking. At that time--- He suddenly couldn't see anything anymore due to the darkness of the night.

The light of the vending machines had vanished all of the sudden.

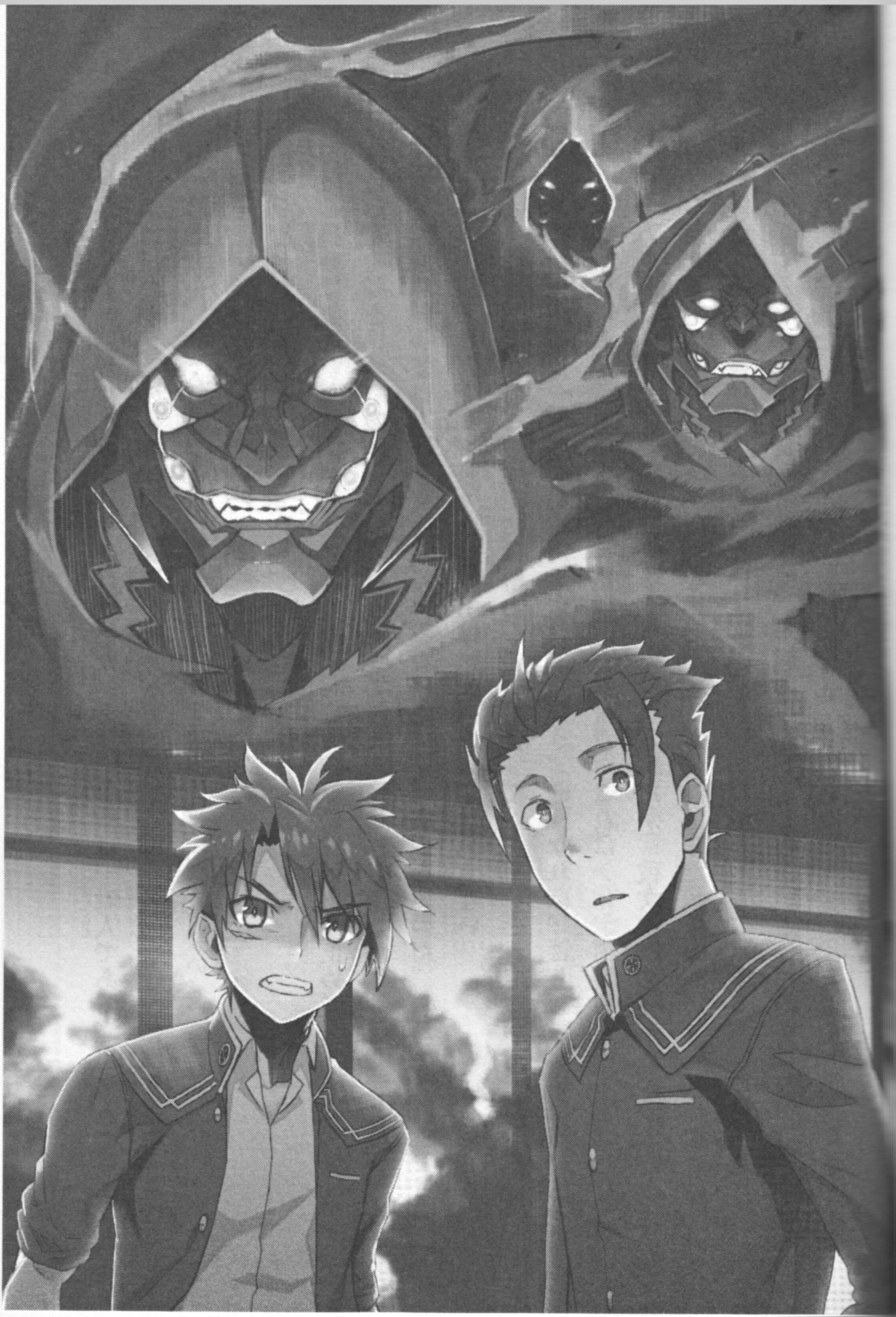
"---Uah? What, a blackout?"

Next to Takigawa, who made a bewildered voice, Basara darkened his expression. Don't tell me--- That feeling became reality. The faint emergency light showed Basara five shadows emerging from the darkness. Amongst them, one had a clearly non-human beast silhouette.

A devil.

"----"

To think the enemy would attack at school, a place that could easily into a scandal. Moreover, "Wh- What are these…"



Basara heard Takigawa's dumbfounded voice. Yes--- The enemy had exposed themselves to Takigawa, a normal human. But, Basara panicked over something other than that fact. That the enemy made a forceful move like this meant that the current situation was favorable to them.

After all--- Mio was sleeping all alone in the infirmary right now.

…What now!?

The enemy was undoubtedly after Mio. The enemies in front of him came to stall him. Them showing themselves in front of Takigawa just meant that they had to kill him off later. Unlike the moderate faction, average devils just considered humans as nothing but living trash.

---Of course a normal human couldn't see Basara's magic sword Brynhildr.

Even if he materialized it now, Takigawa wouldn't notice. But, even if he defeated the enemy with it here, Takigawa would witness the moment the "shadows" disappeared. That would drag him into their circumstances. And Takigawa would surely ask Basara. ---What's this?

He could ask Maria to erase his memories later. However, it would still take some time until she would be here. Right now he had to hurry over to Mio as fast as possible, but it was too dangerous to leave Takigawa alone with his confusion. He believed the enemy wouldn't do anything assertive against Takigawa to avoid letting things go out of hand, but on the hectic developing battlefield an unforeseen happening couldn't be ruled out.

…Then, what do I do?

Basara instantly came up with the answer to that. Then,

"---Sorry, Takigawa." "Eh…?"

Takigawa raised a puzzled voice--- And into his very torso, Basara suddenly slammed his elbow.

A blow to a vital point. It was a violent method, but most likely the least dangerous and fastest one.

Takigawa groaned a short "Ugh", then lost consciousness. Then Basara rested him on the floor.

"-----"

At the same time, the five shadows launched their attack at Basara.

---But Toujou Basara didn't panic. He immediately materialized Brynhildr.

Like that, he made a vertical slash, cutting the foremost human "shadow" into half. Then,

"Sorry, but I'm not playing along with your time-buying--- I'll make my way through."

At the same time he said so, he leaped forward at once.

Until your Sadness becomes Nil

Part 1

Around the time when Basara engaged the enemy--- Naruse Mio had already left the infirmary.

Right now, she was at the place closest to sky on the school grounds.

The rooftop.

Under the pale moonlight, Mio confronted a single girl.

It was her classmate and the Hero in charge of observing her--- Nonaka Yuki.

"---So, what's up?"

When Mio woke up in the nighttime infirmary, Basara was gone, as he had left his seat. The one that entered through the door of the infirmary a little bit later was not Basara, but Yuki. And,

"…I need to talk to you."

Following Yuki, who had told her so with a cold expression, Mio had come to the rooftop.

To Mio's uttered question, Yuki answered quietly--- yet clearly.

"Basara should have told you… about why I'm here."

"Yeah, he certainly told me."

said Mio.

"About who you are--- and your relation to him."

Mio, the inheritor of the previous Devil Lord's power, and Yuki, a Hero. Originally, their relationship should be that of archenemies. Still, so far they had avoided to get on that topic.

Mio wanted revenge on the current Demon Lord, so it wasn't wise to clash with Yuki and make the Hero Tribe her enemy. As for Yuki, she surely just acted out her duty as an observer of Mio. But there was something she understood one week ago--- when Basara transferred in at the beginning of the new term.

"So? I know about you, but so what?"

When she glumly told her "Get to the point", Yuki straightforwardly gazed at her.

"---Leave Basara. He'll suffer when he stays with you… Therefore, leave him."

"….. I figured it would be about that."

Mio knew, Yuki didn't consider Basara a simple childhood friend, she harbored a greater feeling for him. From Yuki's standpoint, the warning was more than warrantable.

Mio could relate to it. But… despite that,

"---Nope."

Mio denied outright, whereas Yuki narrowed her eyes. But, Mio didn't back off.

"Even without you telling me, I was quite worried about that fact. I pondered a lot about what to do. I even tried to chase him out of the house once, to prevent him from getting any more involved with my matters and dangers."

Yes. At first, Mio didn't want to get him involved either.

"…But you know, after knowing my circumstances, he still said he would protect me. That it's no troubles and that we're family. Therefore I thought about what I should do for him, since he said all that."

And she came up with an answer.

"When he's trying to protect me and fighting together with me, even though I don't want to involve him--- Then at least, I won't waste even the slightest bit of his sentiments."

Because,

"What I can do right now is to live up to his feelings."

If she were to obey Yuki's words here and leave him, that surely would be a betrayal towards him.

Mio spoke out her unwavering feelings. In regards,

"………I see."

Yuki muttered only that. At that time.

Along with a shrill SCREECH sound, a shock wave struck Mio. However--- before hitting Mio, it crashed into an invisible wall and dispersed. Mio had set it up beforehand. A magic barrier.

Mio gazed in front--- at Yuki, who emitted a green aura on her hand with the materialized sword.

"---Using force when words don't work?"

Right after saying so, she raised the corners of her mouth.

"Then--- I won't show any reservation either."

She didn't want to make the Hero Tribe an enemy on her initiative, but she would respond when someone picked a fight with her.

Kill her a hundred times. When Mio released her wind magic, the strong sweeping wind pressed Yuki.

"----"

However, a few lines of white sword flashes sparkled and the wind magic was cut off.

Seeing that, Mio clicked her tongue in her mind on her battle affinity with Yuki.

…She isn't a Hero just for show…

The parameter for battle strength could roughly be divided into four classes: "Power", "Speed", "Skill" and "Mana". In short, like the stats in RPG or simulation games, so she was taught by Maria. An omnipotent type would be the ideal, but basically one would strengthen the class he's compatible with. This meant power for Maria and magic for Mio, so they each chose a battle style most suited to their abilities. For Maria that would be a Hard Striker that utilized her abnormal strength, for Mio a High Wizard that released powerful magic at the enemy from a safe distance.

And--- most likely Yuki's type was Skill. Inferior to the Power type at close range and the Mana type at long range, but a class that utilized it's strength to the fullest at all kind of ranges.

Above all. Yuki most likely had real battle experiences that Mio could only dream of. But,

…That's not a reason for me to pull back here!

When Mio glared at her straightforward, Yuki said with her cold expression.

"You want to exploit Basara's kindness so bad that you would go this far?"

"If I'm exploiting his kindness, then what're you doing? Your ignoring his will and forcing your own selfish kindness onto him!"

"! I…"

Yuki inadvertently stiffened her expression, whereas Mio shouted.

"I won't make excuses--- Nor will I regret it! Apologizing to him about involving him at this point would be rude to him! That's why I'll fight together with him unreserved!"

Mio exclaimed with a decisive tone. What she spoke out was her own answer towards Basara's sentiments. This genuine feeling towards him--- She trusted it without a shred of doubt. But,

"….once more."

A chilling voice came out of Yuki's mouth. Inadvertently overwhelmed, Mio gulped.

"If you say that once more, I won't forgive you… You don't even know Basara in the slightest."

"That's…"

It hadn't even been a month since they met. There were things they were hiding from each other or couldn't speak about. But,

"Sure, I don't know him as long as you… Nor do I know anything about his past. But you see, I believe I know his current self!"

She knew more about the current Basara than Yuki, who only reunited with him a week ago after a long separation. How kind he was, how much he was thinking of Mio and Maria. But,

"…That's not true. If you properly knew him, you wouldn't drag him into battles to begin with."

Because, said Yuki.

"He can't fight like in the past anymore… actually, it should be painful for him to even wield a sword."

"What the… What do you mean…?"

Mio inadvertently asked back, whereas Yuki said. The truth about Toujou Basara--- to make Mio give up.

"Five years ago, to save us, he---…"

One breath,

"----------"

These words from Yuki

"…..Eh?"

made Mio asked back dumbfounded. For a moment, she didn't comprehend what Yuki had said.

---It was the reason why Basara was chased out of the Hero village.

Toujou Basara's sin, and the wound in his heart that plagued him even now. And like Yuki had said, Mio knew nothing of it. Thus, her thoughts couldn't keep up with it right away. But,

"That's why Basara and Jin left the village… they lost their Hero qualifications."

added Yuki.

"You must have found it strange too. As to why two Heroes were living as normal humans."

"Ye… ah…"

Naruse Mio realized. Why Yuki was so angry at her. And above all--- How cruel she had been to Basara. Then Mio remembered Basara's words.

'In the past… when I lived in the country-side, some stuff happened. Guess you can call it a trauma… Even now, I sometimes dream of that time.'

…No way…

Mio was in a daze from her ignorance--- Suddenly the door to the rooftop opened.

Rushing in came Basara with a haunted look.

"Here after all…"

He must had run at full speed. All out of breath, his forehead was covered in sweat.

And seeing the traces of their battle and the sword in Yuki's hand, he frowned.

"What's going on, Yuki… She's still supposed to be an observation target. So why are you, the observer, drawing your spirit sword?"

When Yuki averted her eyes by looking down without a word, Basara faced Mio next.

"Mio, same for you… I told you not to fight with the Hero Tribe. Yet---"

At that point, his expression suddenly changed into a doubtful one. He must have noticed the look on her face.

"I, I'm…"

Mio tried to say something right away, but she couldn't speak well.

Because she was scatterbrained. Therefore,

"What's up? Why do you…"

Saying so, Basara tried to come over to her. As to stop him,

"---Well, she just heard about your past."

A smiling voice came at them from a different direction.

Toujou Basara looked. Apart from the rooftop they were on--- there was someone standing still.

A white mask and a black tuxedo. It looked human, but his other senses felt an ominous and overwhelming negative aura from it. He could tell by just confronting it. It was a devil with a considerable power.

…Not good.

Basara changed his expression into a stern one. It likely was the string-puller here, but it was unexpectedly strong. He didn't know it's type yet, but it most likely had an A Rank power.

Mio was set as an S- Rank, but only in consideration for the possibility that she kept the previous Devil Lord Wilbert's power in her. By the normal standards of the village, she would probably be a B Rank. Yuki was a B+ Rank. It would be one thing if the opponent were an A- Rank, but at A or above, it might become a severe fight even with Basara's assistance, let alone Yuki by herself.

Currently it looked like it was standing there easy-going, but there was not a single opening for an attack.

Mio and Yuki must have comprehended the opponent's strength too, as they remained still like Basara, whereupon

"---Well, well, that was a really intriguing story. I knew there was an odd interference before, but to think the exiled Hero had shown up again. What's more, it's the son of the War Hero Toujou Jin. Quite the surprise."

Hearing the white mask say it so happily, Basara narrowed his eyes.

"The attack in the park before was your doing as well, huh…"

"Yeah. I had my eyes on you for a while. I thought for sure you were a normal human, but it turned out you were an ability user--- and even siding with the orphan of the previous Devil Lord. Moreover, you are quite skilled. It appears you also took out the other guys earlier."

"------!?"

On the white mask's words, Mio gulped next to Basara.

She must have been surprised that only Basara was attacked while they were separated. Furthermore,

…My past, huh…

Without a doubt, Yuki had talked about the incident five years ago to separate Mio from him.

Then Mio already knew about it, though he didn't know how much.

About the sin that Toujou Basara committed--- and that his sword was hesitant because of that. There,

"---Oh my? Why the long face?"

The white mask told Mio, whose expression was pale.

"Could you be regretting involving him now? If so, it's too late. It wasn't just at the park or today. The past few days, he swung his sword and fought numerous times without you knowing about it--- After you went to sleep, he kept fighting until dawn."

"Eh---?" "---Shut up!"

When Mio widened her eyes in surprise, Basara dashed toward the white mask at the same time.

Materializing Brynhildr, he swung it down on the white mask. But,

"Whoops."

The moment the white mask said so, the sword that came down with a SCREECH! was repelled by an invisible power.

Thrown backwards, Basara twisted his body at once and somehow landed on his feet.

…I knew it, he's strong…!

It was just a spontaneous attack to seal his loose mouth, but he firmly put his strength into it. It should have sliced the likes of these "Shadows" that appeared in the park and school store in two easily. That very attack was completely blocked and repelled.

Above all, it measured up to the speed of Basara, who was a "Speed Type".

"….Basara."

Basara nodded a "Yeah" to Yuki, who came running over to him. Yuki most likely had made the same judgment.

…It's an A-… No, A Rank.

The strength of the white mask surpassed his expectations. But, he realized something else as well.

He didn't comprehend the full theory behind it, but the defence just now was either a skill or magic type.

If he knew the opponent's type, he could come up with a tactic. But,

…Damn, if only Maria were here…

Unlike Basara's speed or Yuki's skills, Maria's power could break the white mask's barrier with a direct attack. However, it would still take a bit of time until she came here. Basara and Yuki could buy some time while Mio attacked with powerful magic, but should the enemy be a magic type, his barrier wouldn't break from Mio's magic. Then, they would be in a stalemate.

…What do I do?

When Basara tried to somehow work out a tactic,

"H- Hey… Is it true what that guy just said?"

From a bit apart, a doubtful voice called out to Basara.

Basara remained silent and made a bitter expression. Looking at him,

"…Really? Basara… you were fighting the enemy without my knowledge….?"

"Why"--- mumbled Mio.

"Isn't it obvious. For your sake…"

said the white mask while smiling.

"The power of the previous Devil Lord sleeping inside you--- even if it isn't fully awakened, it's leaking strong power surges and attracts low class Stray Devils by it. If any of these low class devils were to harm a human, your existence would be the reason for it. Naturally, the Hero Tribe would deem you harmful then and change you from an observation target to a termination one."

On these words, Yuki remained silent. It was a silence of affirmation.

"If he were to protect you, a termination target, he would become a traitor to this world. The Hero Tribe wouldn't be able to overlook it… Thus, the girl over there told you to leave him."

"Well," said the white mask.

"To prevent that from happening, that boy and your retainer Succubus have been desperately patrolling the city and hunting low class Stay Devils in the past few days… They worked quite hard, really."

"Th- Then the reason Maria didn't come to pick us up at school was also the patrol…?"

On Mio's question, Basara replied with a nod. Unfortunately, he couldn't hide it anymore.

If he were to keep lying now, he would completely lose Mio's trust.

"Sorry… If I had told you, you surely would have blamed yourself."

At night of the day with the bath incident--- Basara had told Maria, who had snuck into his bed, the circumstances and acted behind the scenes to prevent the Stray Devils that were attracted to Mio's power from doing any harm.

So far he avoided telling that to Mio because of the mental burden she already had from the curse, but had decided to do so after at least a month--- when they cancelled the Master and Servant Contract and harmonized her mental state.

"No way…"

Mumbling dumbfounded, Mio just stood there. Then,

"If it shocks you this much, how about you hand over that 'Power' which is the reason for all this."

The white mask declared. At the same time, a "Shadow" appeared behind Mio.

It was already swinging down it's large scythe. But, Mio didn't notice it. Instead,

"Kuh-----!?"

Basara reacted at once. With one leap, he tried to slash at the "Shadow",

"Hee--- Now you're going to erase even her?"

There, the white mask called out to him with a teasing voice. The result was grave.

"----"

The wound in his heart was exploited. Brynhildr vanished from the hand of the agitated Basara. But,

"---UUOOOOOOOH!"

Even so, Toujou Basara clenched his teeth--- and kicked the floor for a forward leap.

At first--- Naruse Mio didn't know what was going on.

"Eh…?"

Before she noticed it, she was looking up to the sky. She had collapsed onto the ground of the rooftop.

….Just what happened?

Thinking so, Mio tried to stand up--- but she couldn't. And she finally noticed.

That a weight was pressing onto her. That someone was lying on top of her.

She looked.

"…Basara…?"

Basara didn't respond to Mio's dumbfounded mumbling.

He didn't move. Therefore she tried calling out to him--- Her hand that touched his shoulder was wet.

It was blood.

"-------!?"

Mio's consciousness fully awakened and she remembered the moment like a flashback.

A "Shadow" had appeared behind her--- And Basara had protected her from it's weapon.

By doing so, he ended up being cut on the back.

"You might be from the Hero Tribe, but you're only a shadow of your former self… Surprisingly fragile."

She could hear the disappointed voice of the white mask.

"No… Get a grip, hey!"

When Mio raised an aggrieved scream, something moved in the corner of her vision--- right next to her.

It most likely Yuki, who defeated the "Shadow" that cut Basara.

"…Unforgivable… How dare you!"

Yuki draw her spirit sword and swung it down at empty space.

"Hoh… That's quite some power."

While saying so kind of impressed, the white mask easily jumped aside and dodged it.

But--- Yuki was already waiting for him there.

As she predicted his evasion, she rushed ahead in anticipation of his movements at the same time as she released her attack.

From a half-sitting stance, she unleashed a sideways sweep with her sword.

It cut through.

But only through air. The white mask dodged to the top--- into midair.

"You sure you should be attacking me? His wound is deep. You need to treat it quickly--- or it'll be too late, you know?"

"……"

The white mask shifted his gaze away from Yuki, who bit down onto her lips frustrated, to Mio. To Mio, who stood up while holding the wounded Basara. And then he declared with a smiling voice.

"Get it? This is the result of your own decision."

"My, own…"

In front of Mio, who became dumbfounded from the result that her decision brought about, the white mask erased his appearance like melting with the air. The night wind carried only his voice over.

"I'll pull back for now. Give it some thought. What that girl said is the truth… You involve others, involved him and got him hurt. Are you still going to continue to fight a lost battle? You should reconsider about who you want to sacrifice for your revenge, others or yourself, and make your decision."

And lastly, Mio heard him add this.

"But--- Depending on your choice, you can end all of this at once."

Part 2

---In the past, when he was at the Hero Village.

Toujou Basara already had a promising future at a young age.

He was the only son of Jin, the Hero of the Great War, and as he inherited his father's talent, his strength surpassed that of the other boys and girls his age. Moreover, the reason a lot of people set their hopes on him was that Basara could use a special skill that no one else could imitate.

<Banishing Shift>. That skill, which could only be unleashed as a counter of an opponent's attack, could repel or disperse any kind of attack, physical or magical.

Moreover--- When he could feel out the <Heavenly Energy>, the "Source of Existence", and cut it, he could banish the existence - the matter of the opponent's attack itself into zero-dimensional space.

Thus Basara was raised with Yuki and the other kids his age, as the hope for the next generation.

---But, these happy days suddenly came to an end one day.

A certain boy from the village, who complained that the already retreated Devils should be tracked down and killed, was fed up with the elders, who wouldn't give their approval, and all by himself… resorted to forcible means. He drew the powerful magical sword Brynhildr that was sealing a S Rank Evil Spirit in the recesses of the mountains near the village.

Devils were supposed to be tracked down and killed. Needless to say, the boy was confident in his own power. Everyone else acknowledge it too. Jin excluded, he was undoubtedly the number one. So he intended to defeat the released Evil Spirit with the magic sword Brynhildr.

However--- it didn't turn out like that. The Evil Spirit took over the boy's mind and body.

And it attacked the detested existence that sealed it---- the Hero Tribe Village.

---To make matters worse, the incident happened when Jin was away from the Village.

Still, it was the Hero Tribe. There were a lot that could fight. They desperately fought and tried to put an end to the tragedy. But, the S Rank Evil Spirit's power resided in the body of someone that was nearly unrivaled in the village. The tragedy couldn't be stopped and claimed more and more victims.

And then--- The Evil Spirit was defeated by Basara. But it happened by Basara losing his mind on the sight of his friends getting killed before him and Yuki getting attacked, thus letting the <Banishing Shift> go out of control. When he woke up, Basara was lying in a hospital bed. And he was told. That the crisis was over. By the hands of none other than himself.

Proof for that was that the magical sword Brynhildr, who didn't even allow Jin to use it, chose Basara as it's master. Thanks to Basara, a lot of people were saved. Yuki was one of them.

---But, it couldn't save the hearts of the survivors.

Basara's <Banishing Shift> mercilessly annihilated the surrounding area to oblivion.

The possessed boy, the Evil Spirit and even some limbs from the victims--- All of it was erased.

Accordingly, it was discussed in no time that <Banishing Shift> was too dangerous and that Basara should be locked away along with Brynhildr to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

Regardless of the fact that Basara no longer could use <Banishing Shift> due to the shock from the incident.

But--- Basara didn't really care. Basara himself couldn't bear the burden of having erased his precious friend and became like an empty shell. However--- Jin, returning to the village, stood up for Basara. Others too, like one of the elders or Yuki's Nonaka Family, eagerly took Basara under their wings. And then a conclusion was made. Basara was stripped off his Hero qualifications and chased out of the Village along with his utilized magic sword Brynhildr. And Jin should go with him to oversee that his ability wouldn't go out of control again.

Basara obediently obeyed that decision. But Jin gave a straightforward objection.

"If being a Hero prevents me from protecting Basara--- Then I'll quit being a Hero as well." Saying so, he left the village together with Basara.

And then--- Five years passed since then.

The memory of that tragedy was still vivid and kept plaguing Basara in his dreams even now.

He couldn't discover an atonement for his sin, nor how to face it.

Like proof for it, he still couldn't use <Banishing Shift>.

Not counting the one time he erased Maria's wind magic as a fluke.

…But.

While his consciousness was clouded in darkness, Toujou Basara thought.

That even his half-hearted self found something he wanted to protect. That he made a new family.

At first, he wanted to protect her as her older brother. But their relationship was a fabrication. The girl he considered a little sister actually inherited the Devil Lord's power. But, she didn't ask for that. Yet--- her life was in danger.

Despite that, she desperately tried to live on positively. Trying to fight against it.

--- In the past, Jin gave up being a Hero to protect Basara. Basara already lost his qualification as a Hero.

But right now, there was a girl that obviously wasn't protected by the Hero Tribe, but neither by her own Devil kin.

So the one to protect her--- to protect Naruse Mio must be himself.

Basara no longer had his previous strength.

Still, Brynhildr reacted to him. His arms and legs moved. And he had a will.

"Therefore---…"

Saying so mumbling, Basara then opened his eyes.

Light pierced through the darkness. Upon that, there was a familiar ceiling before his eyes.

"Good… Do you know me?"

On a look, a young girl was peeking at up relieved. "Mar, ia…?"

"Yes. Please rest assured. We are at home. In your room, Basara-san."

"My---"

Basara frowned on his mental blank--- and then remembered.

Suddenly a dull pain run through his torso and he scowled.

"I see… At the rooftop, the enemy…"

"I am sorry… If I had only arrived a bit earlier."

Maria said apologetic.

"I took the bandages from the infirmary and gave you first aid on the spot, but it would attract attention at school, so I carried you here."

"I see… Thanks, really."

That he was home with Maria by his side meant that Yuki pulled back for now? A look at the clock revealed that it was already half past three in the night. Apparently he was sleeping for around seven hours.

"Uhm---"

said Maria.

"I did as you said, but--- do you really not need to go to the hospital?"

"Yeah… This is fine."

If anything happens to me, don't take me to the hospital--- That was what he asked of Maria after the fight in the park. Sure, he would get treated at a hospital. But the medicines for treatment and recovery influenced one's senses and ability to think. It easily created an opening for the enemy.

"Kuh---…"

Basara slowly raised his body. And then, he tightly clenched his fist.

…Good.

It still hurt, but he could move. His thoughts were clear too.

"Amazing… To think you already regained consciousness from such a deep wound. It would not be strange for a normal person to be unconscious for a few days."

"Our tribe gives special training to our bodies from a young age on… So we recover faster and have better self-healing powers than normal people."

Yuki left his nursing to Mio and Maria specially because she knew of this.

It was an ability that was acquired for fights, to win fights.

Yes--- They had to be victorious. On the rooftop he was overpowered. By that Devil.

"Right, how's Mio---… Maria?"

Basara spoke the name, whereupon Maria reacted by shivering her small body.

Her so far sad expression turned even more bitter.

"…Seeing you wounded made her remember the time when her foster parents were killed. By the time I arrived on the rooftop, Mio-sama was gravely agitated. She was partly in a panic, yet she tried to treat your wounds by herself… I made her rest a bit to let her calm down a bit. And about an hour ago, I told her that you are over the worst, but then"

"Hey, don't tell me----"

"Yes… The next time I checked upon Mio-sama, she was no longer in her room…"

"That idiot…!"

She must have felt a strange responsibility and went to settle it by herself!

"---Basara-san!"

Maria put her hands on knees on the floor and lowered her head as much as possible.

"I am aware that you are greatly injured… But right now, you are the only one who can pinpoint Mio-sama's whereabouts with the Master and Servant Contract! I will not ask you to fight. But at least please tell me where Mio-sama is…please…"

A desperate plead with her body shivering. Therefore,

"---This isn't funny."

Saying so, Toujou Basara pushed aside the blanket and got off the bed.

He didn't mind the scorching pain that ran through his whole body.

"Obviously I'm going too--- I don't want to be a pathetic older brother that sleeps while his little sister is in danger."

Part 3

Leaving the room and house, Mio headed for that park on the hill.

It was a famous spot in the city and normally even at night people came by now and then, but on the vast grounds expanded a thick mixed forest with all kinds of trees and people didn't come to it's deepest part.

"…Good." Inside the mixed forest, Mio used a magic to keep humans away just in case and cast down her eyes after a deep breath. Preparations to wait for the enemy were done.

…Sorry, you two…

In her heart, Mio apologized to Basara and Maria. By now they must have noticed that she left. She knew that she was being reckless. But Mio couldn't think of any other plan.

---Naruse Mio did not know anything.

Dragging them into her fight, they fought for her unknown to her.

And Basara was gravely injured by protecting Mio.

At that time--- The image of the bleeding Basara overlapped with that of her killed parents.

Her heart was unsettled. So much that she fell into a pathetic trembling, even though the enemy was still around.

Therefore--- Maria had told her that she had to calm down first if she wanted to treat Basara. While she trembled alone in her own room, she kept thinking.

The words of the white mask spun around inside Mio's head. You involve others, involved him and got him hurt. Are you still going to continue to fight a lost battle?

Who do you want to sacrifice for your revenge, others or yourself?

---And the answer Mio finally came up with was this.

Still, while she stood here like this, she could only think about one thing.

…Please be safe, Basara…

Mio tightly closed her eyes like for a prayer. Maria had said he was over the worst, but it was still a precarious situation. She could watch over him while praying for his recovery.

But to put it another way, she could only watch over him while praying for his recovery.

…If so.

Mio thought while opening her eyes. She should do the thing only she is capable of. Upon that,

"---Seems like you made your decision."

Suddenly a voice called out from behind. Mio turned around with "Yes".

There in the forest--- in her vision stood the white mask.

Mio fixed her glare wordless onto the white mask. When he left the rooftop, he had said "Depending your choice, you can end all of this at once". Naruse Mio perfectly understood the meaning behind these words. There, just as if he was reading her mind,

"Hee… You're more honest than I thought. But, I believe this is the correct choice."

The white mask said.

"If you were to keep fighting, it would claim more victims. But if you were the only victim, everything would come to an end."

"….Yeah."

Mio nodded. She agreed from the bottom of her heart.

"I alone will be enough for a victim--- for a fight."

The next moment. The white mask was enveloped by a huge flame pillar. She had released Hellfire--- the strongest fire magic Mio was capable of at the moment. With it on stand-by, she had waited.

All for the sake of a perfectly timed surprise attack. Furthermore,

"That's not all!"

Mio released attack magic one after another. Without ceasing her attacks, she released two consecutive lighting attacks, wind blades from eight directions and countless ice spears. These hit into the white mask in succession.

All of them were at full power. An absolutely annihilating preemptive strike that used up all of her magic and mental power.

Lastly she used a blazing explosion magic and while she watched the brightly flames,

"Hah… Hah… N- Now…"

Mio was breathing heavily.

A voice sounded.

"---Now you're satisfied?"

Along with a WHOOSH wind sound, the flames were erased. And the white mask stood easy-going on the same spot, as he didn't receive any damage.

"No way…"

"What are you surprised about? There's no way I would face a waiting opponent unprepared. Don't tell me, you really thought this could finish me off?"

"Kuh…!"

Retreating backwards like pushed back, Mio tried to chant a new magic, whereas the white mask laughed.

"Oh right, it's a wonderful house, where you're living with that former Hero boy---Looks like it would burn easily."

"----!?"

"Maybe I should order my subordinators? To see which brings out a prettier flame, your magic or that house."

"Coward…"

The wounded Basara was in there. With Maria around, they might not get burned by the flames, but most likely it would take their everything just to escape. They couldn't stop the flames. There,

"Coward or not, it was you who involved him… If you want to blame someone, blame yourself."

"……."

Mio bit down on her lips. Yielding to such a threat and giving up wasn't funny.

But what Mio tried to chant at the moment was only a filler magic to keep the fight going.

Something like that wouldn't defeat him, since the consecutive attacks earlier didn't work.

Still--- For starters she could resume the fight with it. She had planned it out in her head.

However, Mio slowly relaxed her stance and halted the chanting for the magic.

"…You're after me, right. Please, don't lay hands on Basara anymore."

But,

"If you were to hurt him any further--- I'll never forgive you. No matter what I have to do, I'll kill you a hundred times."

"I don't mind. If it doesn't cause me any more unnecessary trouble, that is."

The white mask showed a serene smile at the end of his words.

She was disgusted. Her own fight had only just started. It would get serious from now on.

She would rather die than yield to the enemy here.

…But…

Still, she would rather die twice than endangering Basara's life. Then there was only one way.

In front of Mio, who stood there silent, the white mask came over like gliding on air.

"Your hand---"

When she held out both her hands on his request, a purple rope wrapped around Mio's wrists.

"This is…"

"A binding magical tool that seals your magical power. From your earlier attacks I don't think there'll be any problems, but I'll seal it just in case. Now then--- Let us go."

"….Where to?"

Mio had given up on fighting, but not on her hostility. The white mask answered.

"You need to ask?… To the demon realm. My Master is waiting for---"

The moment he said all that, the white mask suddenly jumped back widely to take a distance from Mio.

At the same time. The space where the white mask had been so far was cut through by a wind blade.

"Don't tell me…!"

Like looking up, Mio tried to look behind her--- the direction from where the attack came, whereupon a human silhouette swiftly rushed past her at the same time.

It was a girl that wore the same Hijirigasaka Academy uniform as Mio and carried a spirit sword in her right hand.

It was Nonaka Yuki.

"---Why!?"

While hearing this question from Mio behind her back, Nonaka Yuki didn't slow down on her dash.

Regardless of the unsteady foothold in the mixed forest, she attacked the white mask at once.

However, Yuki's slash was easily warded off by the barrier that the white mask had erected.

"What a surprise, that you would take her side… Is that the judgement of the Hero Tribe?"

"…I'm, not really taking her side."

Yuki indifferently told the white mask, who spoke with a carefree voice.

---Yes. At first, Yuki didn't have any intentions to help Mio.

The dispute about the Devil Lord's power that Mio inherited was something to be settled amongst devils.

Thus, the Hero Tribe didn't plan to intervene actively.

Yuki, an observer, had no objections to that either. She only felt resentment towards Mio, who disturbed Basara peaceful lifestyle, and wouldn't have really minded if she sacrifices herself.

…But.

Basara still tried to protect Mio. When she watched Basara at school, he was looking at Mio without her finding out about it. At any time, he was concerned about her. And unknown to her, he fought for her. Yuki couldn't understand if Mio was worth it. That was why she told her on the rooftop of the school. To leave Basara. To not involve him. And after Basara collapsed from the enemy's attack and the white mask was gone.

Nonaka Yuki tried to vent her fury at Mio.

---It's all your fault. Because you dragged Basara into this.

But she couldn't say it. Because Mio was even more shaken in front of the collapsed Basara than Yuki.

Gravely flustered and agitated, she was still worried over Basara. I'm sorry, I'm sorry… She repeated numerous times while crying. Yuki ended up hearing that grief-stricken scream. That was the reason she left Basara's treatment for now to them when Maria showed up. And then she saw how Mio tried to fight alone and gave up on it again for Basara's sake.

Yuki got the feeling that she understood a bit now why Basara tried to protect Mio.

Besides, there was another reason to why Yuki came here. Yes--- an important reason.

"I believe I clearly told you--- That I won't forgive you for hurting Basara."

So, at the same time she declared these words filled with killing intent, Yuki's whole body was enveloped by light.

Together with the materialization of her spirit sword "Sakuya", her clothes changed into a battle wear.

Nonaka Yuki's resolve. An embodiment of her will to slay the devil in front of her as a Hero.

Then the battle started. In light of Yuki's consecutive repeated attacks,

"Your sword or skill can't defeat me… You should have realized that on the previous battle on the rooftop."

Behind his barrier, the white mask sighed in disappointment. But, Yuki showed no impatience.

"…Yeah? Then--- take this!"

She launched a counterattack. It--- broke through his supposedly impregnable barrier.

"Wha…?"

Yuki lunged a slash in no time at the surprised white mask.

Instantly jumping backwards and barely dodging her sword, the white mask was puzzled.

"My barrier, how…"

"It won't break with one strike. Therefore I continued until it did… that's all."

said Yuki.

"Wait… You accurately kept attacking the same spot…?"

"If it brings you down, I'll do so."

Yuki declared without hesitation. It was a feat that even only a few skill type fighters could pull off.

In the five years apart from Basara, Yuki excessively trained with the sword.

"---Don't underestimate a Hero."

Then Yuki approached forward again. For a moment she dared to sheathe her spirit sword, then she drew it with Godspeed. The cutting edge of quick-draw technique that came from making use of the slip of the sword out of the sheath, was several times greater than normal. In one attack she cut through the oppenent's barrier, and it didn't end with that. Combined with the quick-draw attack, Yuki kept spreading out her attacks.

The white mask couldn't help but to jump backwards widely to distance himself from her.

"Okay… I'll play with you for a bit."

Saying so, he held out his palm towards her--- In the next moment, a black darkness came flying over.

"-------?"

Yuki jumped to the side at once. It was a reflexive movement that didn't consider her landing at all.

Right afterwards. Along with a roaring sound, the ground trembled. Yuki, tumbled on the ground, looked. The place where she was at a moment ago--- The ground of the forest was completely hollow out by an explosion.

"Hee, you dodged that…"

The white mask said in admiration. And then,

"Then--- how about this?"

At the same time he said that, numerous dark spheres appeared around him.

…Not good…!

It was impossible to dodge all these. Defending against them too. What to do--- That short hesitation completely deprived Yuki of her chance to evade. When she noticed it, she was already swallowed up by a fierce impact and blown backwards--- Right afterwards, the roaring sound of explosions sounded. The force of it threw Yuki against a huge tree trunk and the impact made her lose her breath.

"---Nonaka!"

Mio's scream sounded distant. But, Yuki couldn't respond. Her body wobblingly inclined forward.

"---…!"

Even so, she thrust her spirit sword into the ground and refused at least to collapse.

Yes, not yet. She could still fight. Because her life was saved by him--- by Basara.

Five years since that tragedy. What did she become strong for?

…That's, obvious…

Basara sacrificed his own future and saved her. Therefore. This time, she would protect him and those he wanted to protect. She would protect the world Basara lived in--- his every day life.

For that she underwent harsh training and became strong, didn't she.

"Run… quickly, Nonaka!"

Yuki ignored Mio's shouting. Giving up here? Nothing of the sort!

"…Uh…"

Yuki frantically clenched her teeth and slowly raised her head.

And she realized. Why Mio told her to run.

Nonaka Yuki looked. At the huge sphere of darkness that the white mask created over his head.

At this rate, Yuki would die--- Thinking so, Mio acted quickly.

"….Enough---!"

With her hands tied, she still tried to ram the white mask with her shoulders. But,

"---You're in the way."

In response, the white mask casually launched a shock wave at her.

"Kyaaaaaa---!"

Mio, who had her magical power sealed by the binding magic tool, had no way to defend against it. Taking a direct hit, Mio was sent flying to the ground.

"…Kuh… Uh…"

Even so, Mio desperately tried to stand up.

…Like I, would let him…

There was no way she would let get anyone else get dragged into her fate.

She wouldn't sacrifice anyone. Not even Yuki, a Hero.

But--- Emotions alone couldn't stop a tragedy.

"This is the end."

The white mask declared so. At the same time, the huge sphere of darkness was released towards Yuki.

"No… STOOOOOOOP---!"

Mio shouted at once. But the white mask ignored her. And the sphere of darkness heading for Yuki, as well as the cruel reality ignored her too. No matter how much Mio shouted, she couldn't help Yuki.

Therefore, Yuki's death was inevitable--- Or it was supposed to be.

---However. There was still one person responding to Mio.

"…Eh?"

She heard the blowing wind. And then,

"---Leave it to me."

Together with that short mumbling.

Faster than the wind--- A boy got in between the sphere and Yuki.

Toujou Basara arrived at the battle in the moment when the white mask released the huge sphere of darkness.

Basara, standing protective in front of Yuki, was immediately pressed for a decision.

It was impossible to evade while carrying a wounded Yuki. That left only one choice. He chose that sole possibility without hesitation. It wasn't like he couldn't use it at all. But,

"Here I go… <Banishing Shift>!"

Toujou Basara struck his magic sword Brynhildr into the pale sphere.

…Even if I can't erase it completely…

Even if he was still trapped by his past. He should be able to repel or disperse it. Therefore,

"OOOOOOOHHHHHHHH!"

Steadying himself on the ground, Basara put all his strength into his arms and pulled Brynhildr through the sphere.

At the same time he felt it's resistance--- the pale sphere broke up and passed by Basara and Yuki's right and left.

An explosion arose. But, only the ground of the forest was destroyed. Basara and Yuki were safe.

"Wha… Just what was that?"

"…Basara…"

In front of the dumbfounded white mask, Yuki called from behind his back. Basara only turned around his head.

"Everything's alright now, Yuki… I'll take care of the rest."

When he said just that with a smile, he faced forward again.

And then, he scowled a bit. He felt a burning pain on his back.

…My wound reopened from that.

He could endure the pain, but if he kept losing blood, he wouldn't be able to move anymore. He had to settle it quickly.

"-----"

Therefore, Basara kicked the ground and leaped forward. That resulted in the Godspeed of a Speed Type.

Moreover, the speed was close to one in his genius childhood, where he was noted for his talent that surpassed even his father, the hero of the great war.

In an instant the distance between them was closed. The Godspeed attack went straight for the white mask's torso. SCREEEECH! But with a shrill metallic noise, Basara's hand that held Brynhildr got numb. The attack was repelled.

"I'm impressed. That's some excellent swordsmanship. With a normal barrier, even I might have gotten split into two."

The white mask raised a praising voice and continued with "But".

"Unfortunately for you, I strengthened my barrier after that girl broke it…Too bad."

"…Yeah, too bad."

Basara nodded.

"For you, that is---"

And then he shouted.

"---MARIA!" "Roger!"

A young girl jumped up from behind Basara. Her small body was swinging it's right fist.

She, a succubus, was their "Power Type" ally that was lacking on the rooftop.

Her one attack--- smashed the white mask's barrier, weakened by Basara's attack, into small pieces.

"Wha---!"

The shocked white mask tried to re-erect his barrier at once.

"---Too slow!"

Basara was faster than that.

Basara's fighting style that utilized the characteristic of the speed type to the maximum was Infinite Slayer.

Furthermore, his Godspeed sword flashes that looked like thin lines continued a series of attacks.

Kill! That kind of sound started.

Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, Kill, KillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKill
KillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKill
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The speed transcended power, as well as magic, skill and all kind of strengths.

"OOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAHHHH!"

And then--- The last hit struck.

It was an attack with all his might that perfectly cut up the white mask's torso and banished him into the empty darkness.

Mio witnessed that moment.

Basara, having defeated the white mask, stopped moving for a moment, but before long,

"…..Fuh."

When he made a breath of exhaustion, he first confirmed Yuki's well-being behind him.

After exchanging a few words with her, he came slowly over to Mio.

--- But, somehow Mio still couldn't believe it.

However--- Basara's face, looking at her, was showing a gentle smile.

"Ah…"

She finally realized. That she was saved. That Basara came to her aid. Therefore,

…I- I…

What to do, Mio panicked at heart. She didn't know what to say. She knew she had to thank him. But she still hadn't apologized for getting him hurt. When she was puzzled about what to say,

"Mio-samaaaaaaaa---!"

Passing by Basara, Maria clung to her with a dive.

Maria didn't criticize Mio for trying to settle it all by herself.

"I was worried… So worried… Waaaaaah."

Looked like she was really worried. Maria sobbed, like all the worry she had desperately suppressed suddenly exploded. Mio's surprise changed into gratitude before long. She finally realized what she should say first. Therefore she shifted her gaze down to Maria at her waist.

"Sorry… I'm sorry…"

For her selfish act. Mio apologized for making Maria worry. Upon that,

"…Looks like you're okay."

Mio heard Basara's relieved voice. So she raised her head with "Yes".

Her expression froze up.

"What's up…?"

Basara was puzzled--- and right behind him stood a "Shadow".

She had no time to call out.

A short sword pierced Basara's body from behind. The tip of the sword came out of Basara's stomach.

"---?"

At the same time as Basara looked down at his own torso, the short sword was pulled out.

Basara's body collapsed like a loose string.

"No… NOOOOOOOOOOOO."

Yuki, standing apart, raised a mad scream.

The red of blood spread over Basara's clothes on the back. Therefore,

"A, Aw…"

The moment she let out a dumbfounded voice--- Mio's reasoning snapped.

"AWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW------!!"

She raised a screaming shriek and at the same time, a red surge was set free in Mio's heart.

Part 4

The wind howled in the distant. A wind that brought with it a low and heavy ring like a coming storm.

The wind at his cheeks was still balmy. But before long a downpour would surely come.

Then he had to go home quickly.

---With whom?

He immediately got an answer for the sudden question. It was obvious. Together with Mio and Maria.

And they should bring Yuki too. Yes--- They all had to return together. Therefore,

"…Uh…?"

Basara opened his eyes. But even though he tried to straightened up his body, he couldn't muster his strength well.

Even so, he somehow raised his head. And then Toujou Basara saw it.

"This…"

The surrounding space was colored red and rumbled like a from a tremor. Like a tornado, the wind beat furiously. A bit apart, he saw the collapsed Maria. On a different spot, Yuki had collapsed too. Looked like they received some kind of impact and lost consciousness.

And then. In the center of the torrent of red surges that shook everything--- there was Mio.

The color of her long hair had changed into a deep crimson which gave the impression of a blaze--- and on her back grew small wings.

Basara understood right away that Mio's own power was out of control.

And that precisely this was the inherited power of the previous Devil Lord.

Most likely the trigger for it was,

…me, huh.

Just when she was saved and relaxed, Basara collapsed in front of her eyes from an ambush.

She must have felt responsible for it and couldn't forgive herself.

"…I- Idiot… I'm just fine… Hey, Mio!"

"B- Basara…?"

On his outcall, Mio, bewildered, met his eyes.

Apparently she had her senses.

…Good…

There was a ray of hope in the worst situation. With that, the situation might still somehow be saved. With no sign of the enemy, it must have retreated for good now.

Or it was destroyed. Either way, it should be safe to assume that there was no more danger from them.

"Calm down… I'm fine… Everything is over… Okay?"

"I, I'm trying… but it's no good…!"

Mio shouted and shook her head.

"I can barely restrain my power. I, I can't subdue it all. It's not working… Wh- Why?"

The flustered Mio was partly in a panic and Basara changed his expression into a bitter one.

…Damn, she can't calm it down after all…!

But--- that said, he couldn't leave it at that.

…Wilbert had the power to control gravity.

Then, what would happened if it went out of control? --- Before long, that took place.

"Eh…?"

Mio raised a surprised voice. The space around her started to flicker like a heat haze.

"…Here it comes, huh."

Basara clicked his tongue. An excessive mass that couldn't be controlled ended up--- at the singular point of gravity.

At this rate, a black hole would form around Mio and suck in the surroundings.

---Naturally, as Mio was the source of it, the singularity would disappear if Mio were to be erased.

It certainly wouldn't cause the destruction of the world, but even so the vicinity space would get completely wiped out. Most likely it couldn't be prevented that part of the town within the radius of several kilometre would get erased.

However--- that was only Basara's guess. The mass of energy from the rampage was an unknown quantity. It might cause even less causalities, or even more. Thereupon,

"P- Please, Basara… I can't, restrain it any longer… So"

Knowing what Mio was trying to say with her trembling voice, Basara raised his voice.

"Wait! I'll think of a solution now! I'll come up with some kind of---"

"---Listen! There's no more time. Before I destroy the world like this, before I drag you and others into it,"

With a grim voice, Naruse Mio stated her last request.

"Please--- hurry up and kill me…"

It certainly would solve the problem. The fastest solution.

If Mio was sacrificed, the town, Basara and the others, everyone would be saved. But,

"……I refuse."

Saying so, Basara slowly stood up, whereas Mio shouted flustered.

"I, Idiot… Between the world and me, it's obvious which is more important!!"

"Like I care… Tell that to the oh so great Heroes. I'm afraid I'm no longer one of them. I neither plan, nor have the power to do something about something as large-scaled as world peace."

But--- He had the power to save Mio. Toujou Basara knew of the one and only way for that.

In the past he could use it, but not anymore. The unique power in the world that was just his.

…Yeah, right.

It was easy. The situation called for it. For the sake of the future, right now--- he had to overcome his past.

Therefore, Toujou Basara slowly advanced forward.

"…I'm no longer a Hero. But you know, I'm your family. Your older brother. Even if it's only temporarily for you, I seriously believe so. And, as your brother--- I'll protect my little sister, even if it turns the whole world against me!"

Basara threw out the words yelling. To convince not Mio, but himself.

"…I'll bring you back home."

"Eh---…?"

On his mumbled words, Mio asked back.

"I'll definitely bring you home… You'll go back, with me, to our house! As a little sister, shut up and let yourself be protected by your brother at a time like this--- Got it!"

Basara threw his own feelings at her. It wasn't about logic or reasoning, just pure emotion.

But, precisely because of that, it was conveyed.

It reached her.

"…Okay."

While looking close to tears, Mio nodded. Over and over again. And then,

"Please--- save me, Brother."

Mio said. She certainly said it. Therefore, Basara nodded with "Yeah".

"Just you wait. I'll erase it now. Your pain, your sadness, all of it--- I'll make it Nil."

There he halted. It was as close as he could get to Mio, who rampaged her power.

While the gravity urges shook the atmosphere, Toujou Basara took a deep breath and relaxed his whole body.

He started the preparation for a perfect <Banishing Shift>.

He had to feel out Mio's rampaging power--- It's source of existence, the "Heavenly Energy".

But all kind of matters - substances were faintly swaying it's existence.

Naturally, the position of the Heavenly Energy constantly changed. Furthermore, Basara tried to erase the torrent of a raging power. The Heavenly Energy was moving irregularly around at apex speed. If he missed, it was all over. Moreover, even if he cut the Heavenly Energy, he couldn't afford to harm Mio. Not to mention, erase her with it. Not the slightest mistake was allowed. Only 100% success was valid.

From the great blood loss, his vision was hazy--- That alone made it harsh already,

"----"

yet Basara felt his own heartbeat jump up. And his hand started to shake.

…Damn…!

It happened because he factored in a failure. The words of the white mask resurfaced at the back of his brain.

'---Now you're going to erase even her?'

He remembered the tragedy from five years ago. The never healing wound in his heart and his guilty conscious over his past mercilessly trying to swallow his heart. Therefore,

…I can't do it after all…

Toujou Basara thought. That he absolutely couldn't do it--- Yeah, right.

He definitely couldn't do something like let Mio learn the same pain as him.

When he suddenly looked, Mio was watching him with gentle eyes.

When he met her eyes, she closed them.

Her mouth formed a--- "I believe in you".

In that moment, Toujou Basara made his resolve. Like Mio, he closed his eyes.

"------"

Basara entrusted his body to the fiercely blowing wind, the torrent of the raging power.

On top of that, he sharpened all his senses, his mind and soul--- to feel it.

The one and only possibility for Toujou Basara to save Naruse Mio.

And then--- In the next moment, all noise vanished from the world. The rampage of Mio's power had gone up in one go.

The spreading destruction and surges of nothingness.

Toujou Basara just--- quietly swung down Brynhildr.

Part 5

---Right afterwards, Basara's world turn snow-white.

He didn't know if it was from activating <Banishing Shift> or from being swallowed up by the black hole. He didn't even know if his eyes were closed or open.

Just that he used all of his power.

"----"

Basara slowly collapsed forward. Suddenly--- a soft warmth enveloped him.

That pleasantness made him smile inadvertently.

Because he was convinced.

Then he slowly moved his mouth. Even now, he had barely any strength left.

Even so, just one sentence. Basara spoke just one sentence. It was something he absolutely wanted to say.

So he quietly prayed that his voice would somehow come out.

Toujou Basara mumbled quietly.

"---Let's go home."

What he wants to protect

Part 1

After the battle at the park at midnight--- Toujou Basara was confined to bed for a while.

After all, he overdid it even though his wound from the rooftop wasn't healed yet and suffered a grave wound from having his stomach pierced.

Even so, he could avoid going to the hospital, because Yuki gave them a special recovery medicine from the Tribe.

They told the school that he had a summer cold. Same for Mio, so that she could nurse Basara.

It had been five days since the incident--- Basara finally recovered and could safely attend school again.

---And then. Basara was slowly going up the stairs in school right now. He was heading for the rooftop.

Currently it was right in the middle of the fourth period. In other words, he was skipping. It was possible that he was found by someone and above all, Mio was back to school from today on too. Originally he wasn't supposed to take her eyes off her, but

"Well, it should be okay…"

The enemy didn't attack again after the battle at the park. First Basara, then Mio and Yuki were injured and took a couple of days to recover, which should have been a perfect chance for the enemy to strike. Despite that, nothing happened at all, so apparently the case was settled for now.

…Mio's "certain Power" still remained gone.

Agitated by seeing Basara nearly dying, Mio ended up letting the power she inherited from Wilbert go out of control, but a full awakening--- didn't happen. Afterwards she tried to use the gravity magic numerous times, but it never worked. In the end, she was back to how she was before.

---Back then. Basara's <Banishing Shift> succeeded and completely erased Mio's rampaging power.

Maybe it erased the inherited power along with it--- was what Mio speculated. Mio's feelings to get revenge for her parents still remained, but the reason for the current Devil Lord to go after Mio was gone. Likewise it eliminated the need for the Hero Tribe to be wary of Mio and have Yuki observe her.

The situation was developing favourably. But,

…I'm afraid that's too good to be true.

At best, Basara's <Banishing Shift> only erased the torrent of Mio's power that had leaked to the outside.

Most likely, if he had tried to erase even the power inside her, she herself would have gotten erased. But that alone, he didn't want to do.

Therefore Basara betted on the most difficult, but ideal possibility.

Thus, not everything was over now. Even so, it was peaceful for now.

Right now, he should be happy for at least that.

---And finishing climbing up the stairs, Basara got onto the rooftop. First his vision fell onto a clear blue color. The beautiful sky. A transparent blue sky that could only be witnessed in the summer. A bright sunlight was shining down, but it wasn't an unpleasant humidity. At times a cool and refreshing wind was blowing like gently caressing his body.

There Basara noticed that someone else was already present in the corner of the rooftop. It was a boy that looked up at the blue sky like Basara with both arms on the fence that prevented people from falling off--- Takigawa. When Takigawa noticed him,

"Hey--- Basacchi. Back to school and skipping already?"

He said with a teasing voice. While making a wry smile, Basara approached Takigawa.

"You're one to say. You boldly skipped before me."

"Got over your cold? Guess you really caught it from Naruse the other day?"

"Well, could be… Anyway, were you alright?"

"…Mh? Ah, you mean from the school store?"

Right, Takigawa remembered.

"That was too much, Basacchi. Suddenly ramming your elbow into my solar plexus and leaving me behind like that. Do you know how miserable I felt when I woke up all alone?"

"My bad… But I didn't mean that."

A wry smile. Then Toujou Basara said.

"At the park, I messed you up quite bad--- I'm impressed you didn't die."

In that moment, a cold silence spread on rooftop in the middle of summer.

"…….What're you talking about?"

"You wanna play dumb? Fine--- but don't regret it later."

Basara leaned over to Takigawa, who didn't change his expression despite that.

"Hey Basacchi…"

In response to the confused Takigawa, Basara flared up his eyes and swung his arm with Godspeed.

With a sword it would have been a side-slash. Indeed--- Brynhildr wasn't in his hand. But,

"------"

Instantly, Takigawa was far away. That--- wasn't something feasible to a normal human. All emotions had already vanished from Takigawa's face, whereas Basara laughed abruptly.

"Don't blame yourself, Takigawa, that's a natural reaction. After you didn't die from my consecutive attacks, you should have seen how I erased Mio's power… Anyone would absolutely chose to dodge when I give it killing intent, if only for show."

To Basara's words, Takigawa remained silent for a while.

But--- before long he made a big sigh, then resigning scratched his head.

"Aww, and I here thought I had you fooled."

After saying so, Takigawa came over to him.

"--- When did you notice?"

"After everything was over. Thanks to you I was bedridden… While I lay in my bed covered in bandages, I had time to think about a lot of stuff."

Basara shrugged his shoulders.

"I got the clue after I defeated the white mask--- you at the park. When I tried to approach Mio, your subordinator "Shadow" pierced my stomach with a small sword… But that's the strange point. It tried to continue the fight even though it's commanding superior was defeated."

After all,

"You guys were ordered to retrieve Wilbert's power from Mio because you serve the current Devil Lord. Normally, one would retreat at once and report the situation."

"What about the possibility that it feared punishment for failing the mission and tried to save face at least?"

"Sure, that's possible--- But, there's another possibility."

Basara declared to Takigawa's words.

"That the 'Shadow' wasn't the subordinator of the white mask, but was a puppet created by magic."

Then it would explain why the "Shadow" remained there. The "Shadow" wasn't all too powerful. Most likely it was a type of puppet that could only execute simple commands. The "Shadow" probably just obeyed Takigawa's order and attacked Basara.

"…But when the 'Shadow' is a magic puppet, then it brings up new questions. You were surprised at the "Shadows" in the school store during the black-out at night. But you know, Devils might intentionally reveal their appearances, but puppets made by magic shouldn't be visible to normal humans."

"I see. But wouldn't you normally think then that the 'Shadows' aren't magic puppets?"

"But it was worth testing out. If you had been a normal human, you wouldn't have reacted to my killing intent. A safe method to get confirmation, isn't it?"

"For that, your argumentation sounded like you were already sure of it…"

Takigawa still wasn't convinced, whereas Basara said "Kind of".

"…Remember how you told me at school store in that night that Mio looked flushed and embarrassed when she collapsed?"

That had been a fact. Because the activated curse of the Master and Servant Contract was giving her pleasure.

Therefore Basara naturally didn't question Takigawa's words at that time.

"But when I thought about it, it was strange. Sure, Mio is strict with me and might have gotten embarrassed about it, but lately she had been going to the infirmary under the pretext of health problems. When you see her with a red face then, you normally would first think of a fever."

"…..So that's the reason."

Oops, Takigawa face-palmed.

"I screwed up… After seeing her strange reactions numerous times, I understood at once that her attendant succubus was involved. So it was harder to hold back my laughter than to pretend not to notice it. I tried to behave naturally, but… to think that lead me to a slip of words instead."

A disappointed wry smile. Then,

"---So? What now, Basacchi?"

Putting on a gruesome smile, Takigawa asked.

"I don't really mind if you want to continue from the park."

Upon that, the air around Basara and Takigawa suddenly became tense. Like the peaceful rooftop had suddenly turned into a battlefield.

For a while they confronted each other wordless. Basara made the first move. Relaxing his shoulders, he laughed.

"…Not today. As I'm right now, I have no chance against you alone. Besides--- Rather than fighting, I would like to negotiate with you."

"Negotiate…?"

Takigawa asked puzzled, whereas Basara nodded with "Yeah".

"I guess you got dispatched from the current Devil Lord faction to observe Mio. I'm sure you were ordered to stimulate the awakening of Wilbert's power if possible, but seeing as you went out of your way to pretend to be human and attend the same school as Mio, I can only imagine that you are to observe her."

Takigawa responded with silence. Taking it as an affirmation, Basara continued.

"The reason you chose a forceful method this time is that Mio got a new family that protects her--- My existence. Mio's magic powers were triggered by the death of her foster parents. You surely plotted that next Wilbert's power might awaken from the shock of seeing me in the same predicament. I was ideal for that, since you wanted to end your mission quickly, so you approached me, right?"

"…Well, partly. But it's true that I couldn't stand seeing you all alone. After all, I was out of the loop at first too, as I was attending an unfamiliar human high school. Seeing you being left out on your first day made me remember these bitter days."

"…Really?"

Surprisingly his isolation was so great that the enemy sympathized with him.

However--- Basara suddenly smile faintly. Because the killing intent coming from Takigawa in front of him vanished.

He must have gotten interested in what Basara wanted to say. Therefore,

"Either way, you got hasty and screwed up. The current Devil Lord, who wants to get his hands on Wilbert's power, only ordered you to observe, because it's possible that the power disappeared along with Mio, if you carelessly killed her. But, now you got exposed as an observer. You even failed in your forceful method. Isn't that bad in a lot of ways for you?"

"I wonder… I think it won't turn into problem if I seal your mouth by killing you."

"Even if you kill me, you can't afford to kill Mio. You can't cover it up. Takigawa, you're in trouble. That's why you were lamenting here alone."

Takigawa astonished kept silent to Basara's guess.

This was a good chance. So Basara proposed. The earlier mentioned "negotiations".

"Still--- if you say that you'll resume your original observer task from now on , then I won't mind helping you. I'll keep it a secret from the current Devil Lord faction that your true identity was exposed."

On Basara's proposal, Takigawa frowned.

"…What's the deal?"

"Due to your failure, they'll surely send in a new guy. A troublesome one that's stronger than you, to avoid the same failure. They might even give up on the surveillance and make a forceful approach."

But,

"It took all of our current strength to compete with you, so we have no chance against such a guy. Even if we manage to win, just an even stronger one will appear next. At worst, they'll press on us with numbers. Then we really have no chance of winning. So it's much better for us when you keep doing your observation like had nothing happened for a while longer."

And,

"Like that, no one will know about your blunder either--- Not a bad deal, right?"

Joining hands with his enemy Takigawa.

That was the idea he got from the advice he received from the nurse Hasegawa Chisato.

She had said: If you make enemies, increase your allies. And for both allies and enemies the quantity wasn't important, but the quality--- One can't weigh the odds of quantity and quality. It must have meant that you shouldn't treat an enemy as an enemy to the bitter end, but make an effort to make your current enemy into your ally, when you wanted to gain new allies. Even if he was all alone in class right now, it was no reason to give up. It could be perfectly applied to the current situation around Mio as well.

Because Yuki, a current Hero, helped Mio at the park.

Enemies and allies changed, depending on the time. If so--- The determination to join hands with Takigawa was needed for Basara and the others to persevere. Then,

"…I see. Sure, your deal isn't bad."

Before long, Takigawa mumbled isolated to Basara's proposal.

"But you're forgetting… We're enemies. It wouldn't be strange to betray each other at any time when the situation changes. How do you plan to join hands without any trust?"

"I don't think we have to worry about that…"

The situation didn't leave much room, but he too was picky about his allies.

He wouldn't have negotiated to begin with, if he had thought it was impossible.

On Takigawa's words, Basara scratched his cheek.

"Because we're friends… isn't enough?"

"Yeah, I'm afraid so."

Then, he said.

"Because I'm--- still alive now."

"What you tried to do was basically a shock therapy."

Basara declared in front of Takigawa.

"Then choosing a method that shocks Mio as much as possible would have been the most effective. But you didn't kill me…. Not only that, the 'shadow' that pierced my torso avoided my vital spots as best as possible with it's short sword. Pretty much like threading a thread through a pin--- with utmost caution. Precisely because of that I could save Mio and was saved myself, even after late treatment."

"Well, it simply means you were lucky."

"No. Like you had said, we were supposed to have a fight to the death. Sorry, but I'm not so naïve to brush it off as pure luck after being saved from such a situation."

Besides, said Basara.

"The main part of your plan should have been to raise Mio's trust in me. Because then the shock from seeing me collapse would be huge. But in that case, there was one big obstacle."

"Hee… Who?"

"Maria. Now that Mio lost her foster parents, Maria, who kept staying at her side, is the person she can trust the most. She always stays close to Mio, more than I do."

Therefore,

"The best way would have been to get rid of Maria and then to kill me, her last mental support, after you cornered Mio's mentality to it's limit. Recently Maria has been patrolling the city by herself, hunting low-class stray devils. And you're stronger than her. You should have had enough chances to get rid of her. But--- You didn't do so."

Just like he was overlooking Maria. Just like he was actually being considerate to Mio.

Just like--- Someone else gave him the exact opposite order besides the one from the current Devil Lord.

---That said, he certainly wouldn't speak that out. It was merely a guess filled with Basara's wishful observations. But if Basara's guess turned out to be right, that fact should have been Takigawa Yahiro's secret, never to be revealed to others. But if Basara were to suggestively tell him that he realized that possibility--- and that he sympathized with his standing.

Then a trust would certainly be established. Big enough to join hands.

"That's the reason I trust you, Takigawa. I hope… that it'll become a reason for you to trust me too."

Then Basara cut off his words. Because he had already said everything he was supposed to say.

He had played his trump card. Now he could only wait for Takigawa's answer.

For a long time, Takigawa didn't say anything. He pondered about something the whole time. Basara had called it negotiations, but for Takigawa, it was partly a threat too. He was hesitant, which had to be positive. --- How much time had passed? Soon,

"Sorry, but your story doesn't tell me anything, Basacchi…"

"…I see."

No luck, huh.

"---But, this incident really jeopardized my position."

said Takigawa with a sigh.

"For now, I'll accept… your idea."

He spoke out the with Basara wanted to hear with a wry smile. Therefore,

"…Thanks."

Basara returned the smile.

---He didn't know if his earlier guess was right or wrong. Given that it was right, it would be a betrayal against the current Devil Lord if Takigawa admitted it and at the same time, he would fail his secret mission. There was no way Takigawa would unnecessarily admit that, even if Basara's guess was right. But at least for now, Takigawa said he would cooperate. Then it was a job well done today.

And then--- The chime rang the end of the fourth period. Lunch break started.

"Now then, I better go back."

Saying so, Takigawa started heading for the door of the rooftop. So,

"Hey, Takigawa."

In the end, there was still one thing he absolutely had to ask.

On Wilbert's order, two people raised Mio and watched over her growth and happiness.

"Do you know--- who killed Mio's foster parents?"

It was the first tragedy that befell Naruse Mio. The genesis of her revenge.

Takigawa wasn't the culprit. If he had been, Mio would have noticed it already.

However, if it was Takigawa, who observed Mio, or even---

"Yeah--- I do."

Standing up, Takigawa affirmed.

"…His name? What's he like?"

"Hey, Basacchi, we're technically allies now, right? It's not fair to get information one-sided."

"But…!"

Basara immediately tried to pester him, but held himself back. If he were to force things here, the finally gained truce with Takigawa would break.

"……No, you're right. Sorry, forget I asked."

Saying so, Basara cast down his eyes and suddenly heard a sigh from Takigawa. Then,

"---Zolgear."

Basara clearly heard the name Takigawa spoke out.

"Zolgear…"

"It's the guy, who observed Mio before me… But for now it's better if you don't know anything more."

After all,

"C'mon--- Let's go."

At the same time Takigawa said so, the door of the rooftop opened from the inside.

Out of it came a single girl--- Mio.

Part 2

Shortly greeting Mio, Takigawa left the rooftop by saying "See you".

In return, Mio approached Basara.

"So silly… To think you two were skipping class here."

"Sorry. The weather was just too good…"

"Mhm… What did you talk about with Takigawa?"

"Not much. The good weather and such."

Basara couldn't lie to Mio's question. However--- He wouldn't tell her everything either.

He wouldn't tell Mio and Maria about Takigawa's real identity. Nor to Yuki. The alliance was more convenient when of course the enemy didn't know about it, but neither did Mio and the others. That way Takigawa could conduct himself easier.

…Besides.

If he told her, Mio would surely be against joining hands with Takigawa. He was the one, who attack her, hurt Basara and made her power go out of control. Right now, Takigawa was nothing but an enemy affiliated with the current Devil Lord faction that killed her foster parents to her. Thus making her agree joining hands with Takigawa would be difficult. ---So this was Basara's role.

Toujou Basara had decided to protect Naruse Mio. If he could protect her with the frontal attack, which Mio surely desired, it would be the best. However--- sadly that proved to be difficult. That being the case, he couldn't be picky in his methods. Because Mio's enemies were far stronger than they believed.

"…What's up?"

"No… nothing."

Mio puzzled looked up to him, as he had fallen silent, whereas Basara shook his head. Then he looked. At the girl he protected and swore to protect from now on as well. Upon that, Mio looked at him with a puzzled expression, which was cute. Before he noticed it--- Basara had touched Mio's cheek.

"Eh? Wh- Wha…?"

"Ah, sorry…It was unwitting."

When he thought that he managed to protect that expression, his hand had unconsciously reached out.

"………."

Upon that, Mio turned around to the exit at Godspeed and when she confirmed that no one else was coming,

"S- Say…"

Saying so, her face turned just a bit red and she looked down.

"I… didn't thank you yet for saving me, right?"

"Mh? Yeah…"

Was that so? He wasn't particular concerned about that.

"S- So… because of that."

Mio tightly grabbed the sleeve of Basara's uniform, then took one step forward to him.

A distance, where they bodies were about to touch each other.

So close.

…Huh.

Again. What was up with this atmosphere?

It had been the same, when he carried her to the infirmary due to the curse activation, but when Mio was all alone with him, her attitude sometimes changed. Specially ever since he saved her from the rampage, that tendency became more frequently. Even when she nursed him in his room, she suddenly became admirable when Maria left. Thus,

"R- Right now we're all alone…"

While flushing her cheeks, Mio slowly looked up to him.

"Just for a bit, you can do what you want with me, Brother…"

"---Brother? You're…"

Even though there was no mark on her neck. It was Mio's sign that she wanted to be subjugated by Basara.

"W- We could… even continue from the time in the infirmary."

"…Eh?"

Continuing that? Really? Right here?

"……………..---"

No, no, wait. Don't fall silent, myself! What was I imagining right now!

Also, don't be silent either, Mio. Moreover, stop making such an embarrassed and resolute face. What do you think you're doing on the rooftop here? However, in the silence, the atmosphere gradually turned more strange, leading to deadlock, where something had to be done. And then,

"---Mm."

Finally Mio closed her eyes, as she made her resolve--- and entered a kiss scene.

At this point, Basara could no longer brush it away. Therefore,

"……."

Making his resolve, Basara slowly brought his face closer to Mio's.

"…………………….Stop."

Suddenly his arm was pulled from the side.

"Eh…. Yuki?"

On a look, Yuki was holding his hand, unknown when she had shown up.

"N- Nonaka? Why…!?"

"Cannot be careful enough… Stop seducing Basara."

"S- Seduce…? ---"

On Yuki's words, Mio's face turned red in a flash.

"N- No one was seducing him! Besides, first you rescue me, then you bother me now. What's the deal!?"

"None in particular. I did save you, but I said nothing about giving Basara to you."

And then, she turned to Basara.

"I was looking for you, Basara… Eat this."

"I- Is that a lunch box…?"

Basara inadvertently brightened up his expression on the wrapped pouch that Yuki held out.

"Good old days… Reminds me, you have always been good at cooking."

"I made a lot of your favourite side dishes."

"…H- Hold it. I was going to have lunch with Basara after this too."

Mio shouted objecting. Upon that, Yuki showed a victorious smile.

"…Eating air?"

At the moment she declared so.

"---Please leave it to me, Mio-sama!"

BAM! With a loud sound, the door of the rooftop yanked open.

And a little succubus girl--- Maria approached us in a straight line.

"Hey wait, how did an outsider like you get in here!"

"Such a silly question, Basara-san. It was a peace of cake with my adult charm. After I begged them with 'My siblings forgot their lunches…" and teary eyes, they let me in right away!"

"That's simply a crying chil---"

"Anyway! We have lunch boxes prepared as well! Come on, Mio-sama… You cannot lose to this inexpressive childhood friend. Do that for Basara-san. The Ahh~ one."

Opening the basket in her hands, Maria urged Mio.

However, in front of others Mio couldn't be honest.

"D- Don't be stupid… Why would I do that for someone like him!"

She shouted and immediately trembled her body with "Hau". The curse of the Master and Servant Contract activated from her insolence.

"Again! You don't learn, do you!"

"It cannot be helped. Basara-san, please do Ahh~ for Mio-sama… No, make her say Ahh~"

"What're you saying with a straight face?"

"To solve the curse, of course. Please leave it to me. I thought this might happen, so I prepared just the right dish--- No, the right object. Now Basara-san, take his thick sausage and shove it kind of roughly into her cute mout---"

"As if I could! Besides, why should I help to satisfy your succubus lust!"

"A bit late for that. We three already did something even more amazing together. Even the other day, we three had a naked cake play in the ba--- Aww."

"…What do you mean?"

Yuki's voice obviously filled with anger interjected. Upon that, Maria laughed with Fufufu.

"Do you not know? Not so long ago, Basara-san became Mio-sama's Master."

"N- No way… I, I'll neva allo' it."

Ah, Yuki snapped.

"Sorry, but please give up. At any rate, Mio-sama will now offer both her body and soul to Basara-san--- Right in front of my eyes!"

"H- Hey, stop saying things on your own accord, Maria! I'll kill you a hundred times!"

As her symptoms were shallow, Mio recovered from the curse and flared up at Maria.

"Hey… girls."

At last the three girls started to quarrel, leaving Basara aside.

Therefore Basara made a single sigh--- But he suddenly changed his expression into a peaceful one.

The scene before his eyes should actually give him a headache. It was noisy… and so common, thus so precious. A daily routine with a happiness called ordinary.

…Can I protect this?

He didn't had an answer to that yet. Because their fight had only just started.

Even so, Basara had sent Jin a mail last night to report the events.

That he, the son managed to protect the family and house while his father was away.

There hadn't been a reply yet. Since it was his father, he might answer with "You still have a lot to learn".

But, even so he would surely get a passing grade.

He was looking forward to what Jin would say to him, now that he faced his past and stood up again.

He was already thinking up his words for a reply.

It were words of gratitude.

The son, who you protected by even throwing away your hero status in the past.

Now-- He certainly protected a girl that only he could save.

Part 3

The ringtone of a cell phone sounded in the dark forest.

The place was in the demon realm. Actually it should have been a place where radio waves didn't reach.

"---Hello?"

Pressing the button--- The former Hero of the great war, Toujou Jin picked up the call.

"Oh, it's you… Yeah, I already know. 'Cause I got a mail from him."

Jin was talking about Basara's mail to the dialogue partner.

---Normally it was impossible to use human telecommunication equipment in the demon realm.

However, during the great war the demon realm was infiltrated.

For that it was required to establish a way of communication as a lifeline, so various measurements were taken.

With the change of times, the method changed and right now a cell phone had a special magic chip, which turned it's own waves into frequencies and enabled communication to another world.

"That's why I told you that there's no need to worry. Even without this case, he would have stood up on the right occasion."

While Jin laughed,

"After all, Basara is my and--- their son."

Then he responded to the words of his communication partner.

"Well, I know you're worried about him… That's why I kept him at a distance, where you can see him. Then look after Basara and the girls while I'm away. Sorry, but it seems like it'll take a while longer here."

There he dropped his voice.

"Yeah. I really can't get in contact with 'her'. Wilbert is dead. I was worried when she didn't even come to the meeting place at the crucial time, but… I think she's hiding herself to not get found, since the current Devil Lord changed."

Therefore,

"I'll try digging a bit deeper too. There's the matter with Mio too… There're surprisingly a lot of things to do. Don't worry… Yeah, I'll contact Basara."

Then Toujou Jin cut the call and slowly started walking.

Leaving the corpses of the countless devils that had come after him behind him, his face showed a fearless smile.

Toujou Jin declared into the empty space.

"Don't get cocky from one success, Basara. You can't avoid it forever. Because you can't escape from Mio, nor from your past and fate."

お買い上げありがとうございます！

今回挿絵担当させて頂きました
大熊猫介 と申します！ども！
いぁー・・・ラノベのお仕事は
初めてだったので、ドキドキドクン！
反省点も多いですが、
自分の新たな可能性を少なからず
見出せた気がします。（エロぃ要素で）

お話の方も今後の展開にワクワク
しつつ、自分も**上栖先生**のお話に
負けないイラストを皆様にお届け
できるようモリモリがんばりたいと
思います！
（主にエロぃ要素をね！）

オミットしたメガネゆきちゃん

References

1. ↑ The regulation means the legendary loli ban bill in Tokyo
2. ↑ Tetsurō Degawa is a reaction entertainer and says that he was a 'sharp knife' in his youth.
3. ↑ Hito, the kanji for person
4. ↑ A restaurant chain http://www.rairaiken.com.ph/

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Credits

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